

Cornelius Castoriadis and Radical Democracy

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Cornelius Castoriadis and Radical Democracy

Edited by

Vrasidas Karalis



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cornelius Castoriadis and radical democracy / edited by Vrasidas Karalis.

pages cm. — (Social and critical theory, ISSN 1572-459X ; VOLUME 16)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-26229-4 (hardback : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-90-04-27858-5 (e-book) 1. Castoriadis, Cornelius, 1922–1997. I. Karales, Vrasidas, editor.

B2430.C3584C66 2014

194—dc23

2014019405

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual 'Brill' typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1572-459X

ISBN 978 90 04 26229 4 (hardback)

ISBN 978 90 04 27858 5 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ms. Cybele Castoriadis and Ypsilon Books for granting permission to translate the essays by Cornelius Castoriadis. I would like to thank the organisers of three conferences on Castoriadis' work—Dr. Suzi Adams, Dr. Karl Smith, Dr. Jeff Klooger and Professor Peter Beilharz and their universities at the time. I would also like to thank Professor John Rundell for including the publication in the book series he coordinates, Ms. Liesbeth Hugenholtz (Brill, Leiden) for her initial assistance and Ms Julia Berick (Brill, Boston) for her patience and understanding.

Notes on Contributors

Craig Browne

works in the area of critical social theory at the University of Sydney. He is currently finalising a book comparing influential contemporary social theories and extending his research into the relationship between recognition, symbolic power and social imaginaries. He has received funding for research comparing pragmatist notions of creative democracy with ideas of democratic creativity in contemporary French social and political thought. This research into creative democracy builds on his Ph.D. dissertation: *Projects and Anticipations: a Comparative Analysis of Habermas' and Giddens' Conceptions of the Social*.

Andrew Cooper

is currently completing his PhD in philosophy at the University of Sydney. His work focuses on the impact Kant's third *Critique* on thinkers such as Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Castoriadis. He has previously written on philosophy's relation to tragedy, particularly in the work of Heidegger and Castoriadis, and has recently translated some of Castoriadis' lectures on art that will be shortly published in *Thesis Eleven*.

Vrasidas Karalis

holds the Sir Nicholas Laurantos' Chair in Modern Greek Studies at the University of Sydney. He has published extensively on Byzantine historiography, Greek political life, Greek Cinema, European cinema, the director Sergei Eisenstein and contemporary political philosophy. He has also worked extensively as a translator (novels by Patrick White) and the theory of the transcultural translation. He has edited volumes on modern European political philosophy, especially on Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and Cornelius Castoriadis. His recent publications include *A History of Greek Cinema* (Continuum/Bloomsbury, 2013) and *Greek Cinema from Cacoyannis to the Present* (Forthcoming by I.B. Tauris).

Jeff Klooger

teaches at the Swinburne University of Technology; his research is focused on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis. His lengthy study *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy* (published by Brill in 2009) is the first book fully dedicated to the work of Cornelius Castoriadis in English.

Peter Murphy

is Professor of Creative Arts and Social Aesthetics at James Cook University. His books include *The Collective Imagination: The Creative Spirit of Free Societies* (2012) and *Civic Justice: From Greek Antiquity to the Modern World* (2001); *Imagination* (2010), *Global Creation* (2010), *Creativity and the Global Knowledge Economy* (2009) with Simon Marginson and Michael Peters; and *Dialectic of Romanticism* (2004) with David Roberts. He has been a visiting academic at the New School for Social Research, Ohio State University, Baylor University, University of Copenhagen, Seoul National University, Ateneo de Manila University, and Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos

lecture in Philosophy at the University of Melbourne. They have published books and articles in European philosophy, political theory, critical race and whiteness theory and the history of Greek-Australian political activism. George Vassilacopoulos is the author of *Monumental Fragments: Places of Philosophy in the Age of Dispersion*, Melbourne: re.press, 2013. Toula Nicolacopoulos is the author of *The Radical Critique of Liberalism: In Memory of a Vision Part 1*, Melbourne: re.press, 2008. Together they are the co-authors of *The Disjunctive Logic Of The World: Thinking Global Civil Society With Hegel*, Melbourne: re.press; *Indigenous Sovereignty and the Being of the Occupier*, Melbourne: re.press, 2014; *Hegel and the Logical Structure of Love*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999; and *From Foreigner to Citizen: Greek Migrants and Social Change in White Australia 1897-2000*, (Greek), Melbourne and Pireas: Eothinon, 2004.

George Pefanis

teaches Theory of Theater and Philosophy in the Department of Theater Studies at the University of Athens in Greece. He also teaches theatre and cinema history at the Open University of Greece and Cyprus. He is director of the Theater Editions "Theatrical Places", pub. Papazisis, Athens. He writes at a prominent Greek journal (*To Vima*) and in international journals and magazines, such as *Annuaire Théâtral*, *Bulletin de Liaison Néohellénique*, *Revue des Etudes Néohelléniques*, *Italohellenica*, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, and many more. He has published eighteen books on theatre and philosophy (including *Adventures of Representation. Scenes of Theory II*, 2013), and a numerous studies in Greek and foreign journals, as well as many critical reviews and has been invited to present his work, and lecture at numerous theater festivals, as well as theater and philosophy conferences in Europe. He is currently writing a book about the *Specters of Theatre*.

John Rundell

teaches at the University of Melbourne. In the past he taught in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Monash University from 1986 until joining the Ashworth Program in 1993. He is an editor of *Thesis Eleven* (1982–2007), *Critical Horizons* and *The Social and Critical Theory Book Series*, and has published *Origins of Modernity: The Origins of Modern Social Theory from Kant to Hegel to Marx* and jointly edited *Between Totalitarianism and Postmodernity* (with Peter Beilharz and Gillian Robinson), *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity* (with Gillian Robinson), *Culture and Civilization: Classical and Critical Readings* (with Stephen Mennell), *Blurred Boundaries: Migration, Ethnicity, Citizenship* (with Rainer Bauboeck), *Critical Theory After Habermas Encounters and Departures* (with Dieter Freundlieb and Wayne Hudson), *Contemporary Perspectives in Social and Critical Philosophy* (with Danielle Petherbridge et al.), and *Recognition, Work, Politics New Directions in French Critical Theory* (with Jean-Philippe Deranty, Danielle Petherbridge and Robert Sinnerbrink).

Jeremy Smith

is Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching in the School of Education and Arts at the University of Ballarat. He has worked at the University of Melbourne, RMIT, and Monash University. In his academic research pursues a fusion of social theory with comparative and historical sociology. His recent publications include *Europe and the Americas: State Formation, Capitalism and Civilizations in Atlantic Modernity*, with a preface by S.N. Eisenstadt, (2006) and the edited volume together with Rundell, J., Petherbridge, D., Bryant, J., Hewitt, J., and Smith, J. (eds.). *Contemporary Perspectives in Social and Critical Philosophy*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Anthony Stephens

was born in 1941 in Sydney and studied languages and philosophy at the University of Sydney and the University of Munich, gaining a PhD in 1968 with a thesis on the poetry of R.M. Rilke. He was Professor of German at the Universities of Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney and held guest professorships in Freiburg im Breisgau, Dresden and Köln. He became a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1978 and a Corresponding Fellow of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften in 2003. He has published books and essays on Rilke and Heinrich von Kleist and essays on numerous other authors and topics, including Guillaume Apollinaire, Georges Bataille, Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, Karen Blixen, Elias Canetti, Paul Celan, Goethe, Martin Heidegger, Heinrich Heine,

Hölderlin, Horror Fiction, Freud, Franz Kafka, Jacques Lacan, Else Lasker-Schüler, Oskar Loerke, Nietzsche, Nelly Sachs, Mary Shelley, Tsvetan Todorov, Utopian Fiction, Weimar Classicism and Christa Wolf.

Simon Tormey

is a political theorist based in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Sydney. He is the author of numerous books and articles including *Making Sense of Tyranny: Interpretations of Totalitarianism* (Manchester University Press, 1995), *Politics at the Edge* (co-edited with C. Pierson) *Agnes Heller: Socialism, Autonomy and the Postmodern* (Manchester University Press, 2001), *Anti-Capitalism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004—revised edition 2013), and *Key Thinkers from Critical Theory to Post-Marxism* (London: Sage, 2006). He has published articles in journals such as *Radical Philosophy*, *Thesis Eleven*, *The Journal of Political Ideologies*, *Political Studies*, *Critique of Anthropology* and *Historical Materialism*. His work has been translated into Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Turkish, Polish, Italian, French, Hungarian and German. His current writing project concerns the contemporary crisis of representative politics, and whether this presages the onset of new styles of modes of mobilisation, organisation or governance. Simon is co-editor of 'Reappraising the Political' a monograph series with Manchester University Press (with Jon Simons—Indiana).

A Note on the Translation of the Essays

by Cornelius Castoriadis

Vrasidas Karalis and Anthony Stephens

From the four early essays included in the 1988 reprint by Ypsilon Books, we translate here three because they are complete treatises written by Castoriadis himself almost as meditations on sociological theory and its philosophical pre-suppositions. Here they are presented as chapters 3, 4, and 5.

We left out the fourth text which is a translation by Castoriadis of Max Weber's Introduction to the volume *Economy and Society* with extensive commentary of about 70 pages on the opposite side of the text by the young philosopher; the commentary raises some very significant philosophical questions about the origins of Castoriadis' own thinking but it could not be included here because of its length. We will attempt its translation and publication in a separate volume. However in the translated essays, despite their stylistic flaws, the reader can clearly detect Castoriadis' distinct way of philosophising, in a discursive and comprehensive manner.

The fourth essay included here, the "Obituary on Agis Stinas", is written later in 1988 but it presents in a brief and succinct manner Castoriadis' emotions towards his teacher while at the same time recapitulates in admirable brevity his personal political theory.

Prologue

Vrasidas Karalis

I

The essays in this volume are extremely diverse in their understanding of Cornelius Castoriadis' work and approach it from different and probably incongruous perspectives. The authors did not attempt to find any common thematic threads or share their methodological approaches. Each one of them maintains both methodological and philosophical distinctiveness addressing different elements in Castoriadis' thought and legacy. Furthermore, the contributions represent moments in a number of ongoing conversations generated by the work of Castoriadis, a work whose significance has grown more and more since his death in 1997.

However they all share Castoriadis' critical approach to philosophy, both in its political consequences and its ontological presuppositions. Although Castoriadis never gained the popularity or the notoriety of other French thinkers, his work has become more prominent and influential in the current debates about civil society, democracy and individual identity. Within the trends or, indeed, the philosophical fads that came out of France after existentialism, Castoriadis' work is highly individual, belonging to no movement, school or vogue. It was and still remains the unique achievement of an *homme à part*, who worked on the margins of the mainstream philosophical market, and yet succeeded in influencing personalities and events in a subterranean way, during crucial events in history, like in May 68 but also later after the collapse of Communism in 1989. Indeed he formulated problems whose relevance and importance became obvious after the collapse of the so-called "existing socialism" in Eastern Europe, while, at the same time, he articulated a distinct problematic of the nature of the individual psyche and the social or personal processes that, under different social circumstances, empower it to reclaim its autonomy.

For Castoriadis the issue of human autonomy gives rise to a set of questions which focus on the position of the contemporary individual within a society of ever increasing functional complexity and ideological mystification. The articulation of the problematic of autonomy is not to be understood as an answer given by Castoriadis; it is not even a conclusion—it is the *originary* event on which, according to him, the whole of human presence is founded. His whole philosophical project begins with the systematic analysis of what hindered the

event of human autonomy in historical or social terms and evolves with the examination of how it might be regained politically and theoretically. Starting from his early essays, translated here, he explored the conditions and the pre-suppositions that made the project of autonomy obsolete during the historical trajectory of the Western world and pointed out the historical openings that made it emerge from time to time as a conscious project of self-definition and spontaneous collective action. The suspicious reader will definitely find here certain analogies with Martin Heidegger's "concealment of being" which supposedly took place in Europe after the inception of philosophy with the pre-Socratics. Castoriadis, however, sees a completely different historical unfolding of the project of autonomy, as he delineates the circumstances and the conditions that made it erupt in history through the collective and conscious activity of individuals and societies, in different moments and at different places.

For him the project of autonomy abides within the ontological desire of each individual to form a distinct and recognisable identity. Thus, autonomy was and still remains a perpetual potentiality within all social formations that dare to question themselves. The fact that such questioning began in the West does not mean that it remained confined to the Western world; actually, Castoriadis must have been the last universalist humanist, as his thinking posited the human condition as a stable and permanent existential reality under all circumstances: before its socialisation as a natural event, during its socialisation as a social formation and after the critical reflection on its formation as an agent of historical change. Such unfolding encapsulates how Castoriadis considered autonomy as a real possibility actualised when humans *question* their given reality, or, indeed, when they dare to take on the moral ability to start a new opening in its signification practices by inaugurating a new beginning in the institution of such significations.

In this respect, Castoriadis belongs to the tradition of the radical Enlightenment and, despite his differences, to the ideas expressed by Immanuel Kant in his emancipatory manifesto, summed up as "*sapere aude*". However, Castoriadis would have gone on to include from the original verse by Horace: "*sapere aude, incipe*" as the audacity of knowing is inextricably connected with the imperative to action: you dare to know only if you dare to act; otherwise knowledge is mediated by the mechanisms of dominant "imaginary significations" that occlude reality and the mind that perceives it. At the same time, Castoriadis stands worlds apart from Michel Foucault's interpretation of the Enlightenment project of the "limit-experience", considering it as an exercise in individualism and antinomic self-transcendence. For him, "*sapere, aude, incipe*" meant the nexus of the social and the individual, the point of conver-

gence between the known and the unpredictable, the point at which individual action moves beyond the conditioning of its formation and re-imagines its identity.

Such “*anti-stasis of being*” as a social postulate is the most important aspect of Castoriadis’ project of autonomy. It erupts spontaneously in history in the course of individual and collective action and cannot be reduced to or deduced from what preceded it. This manner of thinking challenged the dominant philosophical schools of his time; it refuted the determinism of positivist thought and rejected the hyper-determinism of structuralism and post-structuralism. Such a radical challenge to tradition accounts for the marginalisation that was imposed upon him and his philosophy by the French philosophical establishment. Castoriadis’ opening within the historical realm of a creation which cannot be explained or reduced to the specificities of its environment is not a metaphysical or, indeed, religious element in his thinking. It goes beyond the limitations of the existing patterns of thinking and paves the way for societal expressions and individual actions that liberate human potential from its own established stories and consecrated practices. ‘*I create therefore I am*’, should be Castoriadis’s legacy to the philosophy of the future.

II

The volume consists of two parts; in the first part we translate Castoriadis’ own early essays from the original in Greek. The essays articulate his philosophical questions during the early period of his intellectual formation, while at the same time indicating his philosophical sources. Dominant amongst them was the sociological and theoretical reflection of Max Weber, as most of the essays are dedicated to the study of his work and how they could apply, under the circumstances of the Second World War, to the re-invention of social sciences in an innovative way. In the introduction to their interpretation we try to locate the origins of the questions that led him to the discovery of Max Weber’s theory and indicate their possible references to the specific thinkers who influenced Castoriadis during this period of his intellectual biography.

Castoriadis’ early thought found in Weber both a pragmatic and an idealistic point of reference; he discovered him through the Greek neo-Kantians who imported his work to the country after the Great War and, especially in local terms, after the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922. At the same time, he framed Weber’s theories, especially on history and society, through the principles of Marxist and especially Trotskyist thinking during the mid-war fierce ideological

battles between left-wing tendencies. The essays are contradictory, at times badly written and over-condensed; however they are unique documents whose study might well reshape the orientation of Castoriadian studies.

The second part of the volume consists of ten essays which explore different but related aspects of his work. Anthony Stephens' essay addresses a vexed and challenging issue, as it contrasts Castoriadis' interpretation of the famous choral *stasimon* from Sophocles' *Antigone* to the well-known and, in some circles, 'canonical' interpretation of the same passage by Martin Heidegger. Stephens attempts what he calls an "adjudication" between the two interpretations by a close reading of their translations in German and English and by the systematic re-examining of their semantics. In conclusion, Stephens stresses the more historical approach to the Sophoclean drama by Castoriadis, while indicating the conscious effort by Heidegger to efface this dimension.

Andrew Cooper's contribution discusses the relationship between aesthetics and autonomy in Castoriadis. The essay investigates the role of aesthetics as understood by Castoriadis throughout his philosophical development, especially during the last period of his life when he recognised tragedy as the most effective way of redefining modern subjectivity in its "understanding of autonomy not simply as self-institution but, paradoxically, as a tradition". Cooper provides a systematic analysis of the permanent role that Castoriadis assigned to the aesthetic experience as "window into chaos" and demonstrates the political character of aesthetics in his work.

George Pefanis' essay deals with the ways in which Castoriadis' theory of creation can be used in the theatre for new "imaginary significations", since tragedy was and still is predominantly a theatrical performance, thus a public space where different gazes meet and converge. Pefanis stresses the creative innovation of the theatrical "drama" and suggests that Castoriadis' theory of autonomy is not an academic exercise but a "material" project that invites viewers to proceed with new projects of their own challenging established hierarchies and orders of political complacency through the creative visualisation of what is not present.

Peter Murphy's contribution is systematic critique of Castoriadis's own interpretation of bureaucratic capitalism; Murphy delineates Castoriadis' leftist origins but also indicates the less obvious threads of his thought which are "less left-wing", as he terms them, and consist of an exploration of "the *eros* of making, innovating and bringing-into-being" which associate him with the creative forces within the capitalist system itself. Murphy's thesis represents a radical repositioning of Castoriadis's thinking which merits more discussion.

Jeremy Smith's analysis contrasts Castoriadis's critique of capitalism to an analogous critique by Johann P. Arnason. Smith points out similarities in the

way that both thinkers analysed the “rational mastery” of the world in general but also in specific societies, such as that of Japan (Arnason). Smith outlines the different perceptions of radical action that we find in their work but, at the same time, the common ground they share, as the project of autonomy leads to the realisation that “radical democracy’s value may lie in the assertion of the variety of different kinds of living that do not conform to the rationalising impulse of the social imaginary significations of capitalism and thereby perpetually put them into question”.

Simon Tormey’s essay examines Castoriadis’ heterodox Marxism against the background of postmodernism, exploring his libertarian thinking vis-a-vis his attempt to become “a resource for careful scrutiny, reflection and contemplation by all those who wish to develop and enhance a radical leftist critique of the ‘social-historical’ *a priori*.” Essentially Tormey’s analysis foregrounds Castoriadis’ radical critique of all forms of historicism and determinism that had bedevilled orthodox Marxism, and indicates the lasting contribution of Castoriadis’ thinking to reshaping the Marxist tradition.

Craig Browne’s contribution is a comparative analysis of Castoriadis’ vision of creative democracy with those of other thinkers, such as John Dewey. G.H. Mead and Claude Lefort. For Browne, Castoriadis belonged to a wider group of thinkers who undertook to explore the creative potential of democracy and he examines the various strategies they suggested in order to express the historical trajectory of democracy as a lived experience. Castoriadis’ relation to pragmatism is a new frame of reference that Browne adumbrates and that deserves more detailed exploration.

Jeff Klooger’s contribution explores Castoriadis’ understanding of democracy as social autonomy. Starting with a detailed critique of John Keane’s book on democracy, Klooger suggests that Castoriadis’ understanding of democratic processes creates open spaces for self-correction as it retains to ability to imagine unforeseen new potentialities of social existence. Reverting to the history of democracy does not necessarily lead to a better imagining of its reality while he argues that Castoriadis does not limit “our ability to imagine democracy as something other than the merely real and already achieved”.

John Rundell’s contribution investigates Weber’s impact on Castoriadis’ understanding of the past and especially “the interrelation between the circulation of power and the contingency of democratic political forms”. If read in connection to Castoriadis’ early texts on Weber, Rundell’s essay offers a new perspective on their shared understanding of democracy, not simply “as a tragic regime but as a fragile one”, as Rundell concludes.

Finally, Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos provide a thorough and systematic Hegelian reading of Castoriadis’ work and investigate the

limits and the possibilities of democratic subjectivity. In a critical and sometimes antagonistic manner, their analysis foregrounds Castoriadis' concept of "chaos" and its ontological significance for contemporary political democracy. The authors find both the concept itself problematic and also the way in which it was employed by Castoriadis to indicate the potentialities of the project of autonomy. They conclude that "Castoriadis does not escape an inadvertent reduction of radical democratic subjectivity to the empty formalism that he otherwise opposes"—a conclusion that closes this volume on a provocative and challenging note which would have immensely pleased Castoriadis himself. His work still annoys and upsets—and that is the philosophical legacy of a thinker who avoided meticulously easy answers and the seduction of being canonical and accepted.

Introduction to Cornelius Castoriadis' Early Essays

Vrasidas Karalis

The Intellectual Background

I think that all those interested in my current work will find in these writings the problematic whose intensity defined the whole of my subsequent trajectory. First of all, certainly, the question of politics, and the awareness of the need for a radical social change, the faith in the creativity of the large masses of people, and the central character of the democratic project. Equally also, they will find my philosophical quest: how we can think about society and history and, starting with this: what we can think about our relations, as human beings, together with the “objects” that surround us (and constructs us) as well as about the ideas that determine these relations. This quest is already formulated in some of its salient elements, according to my perception, in these writings of 1944; reading them again, after this reprint, I frequently found myself forced to pause and reflect. Maybe it wouldn't be arrogant to hope that the same may happen with younger readers.¹

This is how Cornelius Castoriadis described his earliest published works when they were reprinted in Athens, in 1988, by Ypsilon Books. These writings are not in any way insignificant juvenilia, with impressionistic and somehow sentimental rhetoric, that we find in the early work of many thinkers. They express unambiguously strong ideas about power structures while grappling with significant sociological questions; even more daringly they attempt to answer certain philosophical problems in a positive and, following their young thinker's ambition, in a conclusive way. Probably what contemporary readers of his philosophy can appreciate in these essays is more his determination to answer these questions and less the actual significance of his answers.

What might puzzle the reader however, is the over-condensed language used by the young thinker, compressing together endless abstract notions and obscure terms in order to construct a *personal* philosophical language beyond the presumed limitations of its constitutive discourses. Later in his political career, Castoriadis was accused by orthodox Marxists, or indeed orthodox

1 Cornelius Castoriadis, *First Essays* [*Protes Dokimes*], *Max Weber-On the Theory of Social Sciences*, Ypsilon/Books, Athens, 1988 p. 10.

Trotskyists, of being a voluntarist; Alex Callinicos for example in his short study on Trotskyism talked about “the triumph of the will” in his philosophy, (meaning individual will) as, in his attempt “to radicalise the voluntarism implicit in his conception of bureaucratic capitalism” he didn’t attribute historical change to a social class but to “the imaginary, which is creation *ex nihilo*.”² Such voluntarism can be also detected in his early attempt to synthesise philosophical idioms and indeed philosophical discursive traditions—and by synthesising them to produce a new perspective in philosophical theory.

Castoriadis’ early texts are written in a rather impetuous and aggressive style; and despite their bad syntax, endless conditionals, incomprehensible hypotactic structure and dense arguments, they present strong and forceful ideas about many important questions of his thinking that would later develop into major thematic axes of his later philosophy. The reader of the original can easily detect the stylistic defects of their language: excessive use of vernacular grammatical forms, reminiscent of the hard-line communist idiolect of the period, long and convoluted sentences, finally a certain oracular tone in articulation which gives them a peculiar sense of urgency and intensity. Despite all these defects, which we tried not to entirely improve in the translation, they are of unique significance as they indicate both the basic structural skeleton of his subsequent philosophy and show the continuous dialogues that informed it since its very beginnings.

The reader also feels their fervent almost agonizing need to address the prevailing intellectual and social crisis in his country, attune their philosophical language to the dominant issues of their day, and finally question the hegemonic paradigm of their philosophical horizon both in Greece and Europe. The young Castoriadis struggled to articulate a vision that went beyond the horizon of meanings dominating the surrounding philosophical traditions in Greece—if we accept that there was such a thing as *modern* Greek philosophy, something that Castoriadis himself later rejected. Together with their stylistic, and occasionally semantic, problems, the reader can feel the intense “*totalising*” attitude of the young philosopher in his attempt to bring together disparate philosophical discourses and give them semantic cohesion under an undefined yet project which was still under exploration in his early twenties.

In order to appreciate their significance, we have to keep in mind the very precarious historical realities around them and the contextual instability of their semantics. They all appeared in a short-lived journal entitled *Sociological and Ethical Archive*, released in Spring 1944 when Athens was still under German Occupation (the Germans left Athens in October of the same year).

2 Callinicos, Alex, 1990, *Trotskyism*. Buckingham: Open University Press, p. 75.

It seems that despite the heavy censorship and the atmosphere of persecution and oppression, Castoriadis and the group of intellectuals he belonged to, were involved in intense debates on the relations between theory and practice, power and society, history and freedom. These debates were extremely diverse because of the multiple origins of his ideas and most importantly of his intellectual and political commitments. Since 1936, Castoriadis had joined the Greek Communist Party but soon discovered himself at odds with its Stalinist ideology and the centralised Bolshevik structure of the party itself. The adventure of Leo Trotsky and the power of his arguments about the “Revolution Betrayed” played a key-role in the gradual estrangement between him and the Communist-Stalinist ideology of the period. The crisis of Marxist ideology was already obvious since the late twenties. Political and social events in Greece delayed its eruption; however after the Moscow trials and the assassination of Leo Trotsky the infightings were intensified and in many occasions took concrete forms of overt conflicts and long-term strategies of mutual extermination.

Initially, Castoriadis became a member of the Trotskyist opposition under the leadership of Agis [Spyros] Stinas (1900–1987) a staunch and relentless communist fighter, who developed a form of struggle called “revolutionary defeatism” after he witnessed the failure of the communist project in the Soviet Union with its degeneration to a dictatorial oppressive state, as well as the persecution by the official Communist party after he criticised them for compromising their revolutionary spirit. Stinas’ intellectual origins went back to the first break within the ranks of the Greek Communist Party in 1932 with the formation of a split organisation called *Marxist Archive* [*Archeio Marxismou*] which remained until 1951 an active opposition to the bureaucratic centralisation and Stalinisation of the Greek Communist Party. Under the continuous inspiration of Trotsky’s “perennial revolution”, although after 1943 he moved closer to anarchism, Stinas insisted that the working class does not have a motherland or a national homeland, and that workers could not possess any national identity, because such identity would be imposed upon them by their own oppressors, the capitalists. “The nation,” he wrote later, “has fulfilled its historical mission. National liberation wars and bourgeois revolutions are today concepts without meaning. [...] Defending the nation and the motherland in our era means nothing else but defending imperialism, the social system that creates all wars which cannot survive without wars and which leads human society towards chaos and barbarism”.³

3 Stinas, Agis, 1985, *Recollections, Seventy years under the banner of Socialist Revolution*, Ypsilon Books: Athens, p. 384.

For Stinas and his group, individual and collective identity was only defined by social position and was determined by their relationship with the working class; consequently they saw themselves predominantly as workers and not as Greeks. Such “de-nationalisation” of state-identity had alarmed the nationalist Greek state and forced its apparatuses to take radical legal measures against the “un-patriotic communists” starting as early as 1929 and continuing later, under the dictatorship of 1936, with exile and imprisonment of the “anti-nationally thinking communists”. According to Stinas, the main opponent of the worker was primarily the bourgeoisie and its imperialist ideology as the most aggressive form of capitalism: the class enemy didn’t have a national character or ethnic conscience—there was always collusion between the ruling establishments in the different capitalist states. When, later, Stalin declared the necessity of “socialism in one state” and denounced the continuous international revolutionary project, Stinas and his small but vocal group, rejected their deviation from the authentic declarations of the Russian revolution and remained closer to the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg as expressed in her critical writings against Lenin. Initially, the group approached Trotsky but they were disappointed with him also as he insisted, on the essential socialist character of Soviet Union, as a worker’s state, despite the Stalinist “temporary deviation”.

However, soon they differentiated themselves from them, as the later didn’t criticise the Soviet Union. For many years, until his silent but obvious acceptance of anarchism, Stinas and the young Castoriadis remained close allies, indeed fellow-travellers, of the Trotskyists, until their complete alienation from them when the Second World War was approaching its end. However, as Panayiotis Noutsos argued in his monumental four-volume collection of *Socialist Thought in Greece*, Castoriadis as late as 1948 was the representative of the Stinas group at the second conference of the 4th International advocating “the perennial revolution within the revolutionary theory”.⁴ His belligerent critical spirit eventually brought him to an implicit break with Stinas himself; after he escaped in France in 1945, Castoriadis became involved in a completely different way of political and philosophical activism, participating in a radical intellectual fermentation that followed the end of the war. The fermentation lasted over ten years, until the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 shattered completely any illusions or hopes left in him about the nature of the Soviet Union, or indeed eventually about the revolutionary character of the Marxist theory.

4 Noutsos, Panayiotis, 1993, *The Socialist Thought in Greece*, vol. 3, Athens: Gnosis Publications, p. 122.

During the German Occupation in particular, Stinas advocated the idea that “the Greek proletarian struggle against its own bourgeoisie, even under conditions of occupation, could become the example to awaken the class consciousness of the enlisted German workers, make fraternisation possible and stimulate the struggle of the German proletariat against Hitler”.⁵ His utopian project was doomed to fail due to lack of response by the German soldiers and of course by his persistent persecution by the Greek State and the Communist Party. After 1942, an intense power struggle broke out between Orthodox communists and Trotskyists after, as the Trotskyists claimed, the Greek Communist Party lost its internationalist character and evolved into an extreme nationalistic organisation ferociously persecuting its critics and opponents. The critics of the Communist Party rejected its Stalinist bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation while at the same time, paradoxically, supported Trotsky’s idea that they had to defend the working class achievements in the revolutionary state of the Soviet Union.

Despite the absence of any philosophical education, Stinas offered Castoriadis the first active criticism of bureaucracy and of the bureaucratisation of the Communist party, which he interpreted as a despotic organisation and a reactionary mechanism for control and domination. After the liberation from the Germans, (October 1944) the notorious OPLA fighting squad of the Communist Party took over the revolutionary task of executing each one of its opponents through mass purges that led to the death of many prominent intellectuals and the hasty escape of others to other European countries—one of them being Castoriadis himself. When the scholarship of the French Institute in late 1945 was awarded to him, it was the best opportunity not simply to leave for another country but also to escape death in the hands of his former communist comrades.

Next to Stinas, we can also detect the shadowy presence of the most mysterious personality of the Greek Communist Party, Pantelis Pouliopoulos (1900–1943), who became its leader in the early age of twenty four, until he was thrown out in 1927 because of his ideas on ethnic minorities in the Balkans and his persistent appeals for the fragmentation of the Greek nation-state with the establishment of autonomous republics in Macedonia and Thrace. After his expulsion from the Communist Party, Pouliopoulos represented the Trotskyist voice of opposition within the ever growing Bolshevisation of the party, which he himself had inaugurated. Trotsky however, allied himself with other groups, the so-called Archival-Marxists, something that caused enormous ideological anxiety and indeed confusion to Pouliopoulos. Later, he joined another

5 Stinas, A, *ib.*, p. 390.

marginal group which published the journal 'Spartakos', but his disagreement with Trotsky continued. He reappeared as a member of the Greek committee that established the Fourth International in 1937 in Paris. After 1941 he disagreed even with Stinas about his revolutionary defeatism. Till the end of his life, he remained a staunch internationalist without any concession to patriotic or national ideals, as accepted by the Communist Party and Stalin during the Great Patriotic War. His charisma was so appealing that as he was about to be executed by the Italian officers, the Italian soldiers declined to do so, after he talked to them in impeccable Italian.

Together with the ideological influence of Stinas, the style of writing and most importantly the staunch and relentless anti-state critique of Pouliopoulos can be detected in Castoriadis's early writings, as well as his later critique of the modern bourgeois state. Pouliopoulos's obsessive belief that the state was an impersonal mechanism of total oppression instituted and imposed by the ruling class, the capitalists, in order to dominate, inferiorise and exploit, remained a salient element of Castoriadis's political thinking. In an inflammatory document written by Pouliopoulos in 1940 we read: "In front of a defeated or betrayed national-liberating movement or in front of nationalistic, enslaving activities of their national bourgeoisie the communists do not close their eyes and do not become worshippers of the *"fait accompli"*. They won't deny the reality of the national oppression of an ethnicity and its desire (which exists in the heart and the mind of every Macedonian worker) to get rid one day of that national yoke. The communists make their own these liberation desires of the Macedonian people and declare loudly from now their right to self-determination until their state separation, if this is what they want. They constantly defend every immediate national claim, economic, political, and cultural and therefore they prepare the coming revolutionary alliance of the social revolutionary movement of the proletariat with the national revolutionary movement of the Macedonian against the common enemy of the Balkan bourgeoisie".⁶ Pouliopoulos also elaborated a Marxist theory for the revolutionary society, according to which the working class will abolish all social forms of capitalist domination, by changing the nature of economic activity, the use of money and of the role of the state itself. The surplus and profit of all economic activity wouldn't be taken by the "people's representatives", that is the Soviet style party members, but by the actual producers themselves, without any distinction in the role each individual plays in the chain of production: "The Socialist revolution, he wrote, will abolish all commercial exchange, all

6 Pouliopoulos, Pandelis, 1991 (Written May 1940), "The Macedonian Question and the Communists", Journal Spartakos, no. 30, Athens, p. 31.

anarchy in production, all division in social classes . . .”⁷ As he was differentiating himself from what he called the Stalinist “centrism” his ideas were more anarchist in character, foregrounding a deep critique of the function of the state.

Castoriadis’ debt to the Marxist and Trotskyist discussions of this period may account for his strong suspicion towards the state, not as a neutral and supra-class mechanism of regulating social tensions and imposing the social contract, but as a brutal mechanism of control, coercion and domination. Also Pouliopoulos’s critique of the Stalinist Soviet Union, while recognising at the same time the socialist character of its politics, left an ambivalent imprint on the young Castoriadis’s thinking. Pouliopoulos, like Leon Trotsky, believed that the Soviet Union, under Stalin, was indeed a degenerated worker’s state which, despite the Stalinist distortions, it maintained its socialist character. However, under the influence of Stinas, the young Castoriadis rejected this and started developing the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism, which later became one of his most significant points in the criticism of existing socialism. In a text written as early as 1946, probably his first foray in French, Castoriadis declared:

Only a short time ago revolutionary politics consisted essentially of the struggle against the overt instruments of bourgeois domination (State and bourgeois parties). For a long time, however, it has been complicated by the appearance of a new and no less fundamental task: the struggle against working-class’s own parties. The working class had created these parties for its liberation, but, one way or another, they have been betrayed by them. This process of permanent deterioration from the top has taken such importance that it is impossible to elaborate a coherent and effective revolutionary politics today without having a clear conception of its nature and dynamic.⁸

Castoriadis rejected the Soviet Union as a totalitarian bureaucratic state which fabricated its own ideological legitimization through “well-known reactionary themes (Fatherland, Family, Religion, etc.) [which] does not signify a trend toward the return of capitalism but derives simply from the stabilisation of a class that, in order to justify its domination, gives itself an “ideology” by grabbing

7 Pandelis Pouliopoulos, *Synoptic Theses on Political Economy*, Courier Publications, Athens, 2004, p. 67.

8 Castoriadis, Cornelius, 1988, *Political and Social Writings 1946–1955*, vol. 1, Ames Curtis, David (Trans) University of Minnesota Press, p. 37.

it up wherever it can".⁹ Even in his early texts within his new ideological and political milieu in France, Castoriadis proceeded with a brave and radical critique of both Soviet Marxism and dissident Trotskyism: his experiences in Greece gave him an unmediated understanding of how the Communist Party operated in order to impose its domination and political rule not as a liberating force but as a new bureaucratic class, which later characterised as "bureaucratic capitalism". His Greek experiences also offered him an insider's understanding of the intolerance towards genuine critical thinking by the Communist Party—something that he detected in the French Communist party of the period and indeed in all communist parties in Western Europe after the war.

In a moving autobiographical text, written as a general introduction to his political writings in 1972, Castoriadis talked about how "an adolescent, discovering Marxism, thought that he was being faithful by joining the Young Communists during the Metaxas dictatorship, nor why he might have believed, after the occupation of Greece and the German attack against Russia, that the chauvinistic orientation of the Greek CP and the constitution of the national Liberation Front (EAM) were the result of a local deviation that could be redressed by an ideological struggle within the Party".¹⁰ The text reads like a poignant reconstruction of the hope and disenchantment that the adolescent must have felt when he understood that there was no democracy and most importantly no political dialogue within the Party. He concluded this very important personal recollection: "As arguments were reduced to bludgeons and as he listened to Russian radio broadcasts, his self-deception quickly ended. The reactionary character of the Communist party, of its politics, of its methods, of its internal system or rule as much as the cretinism that permeated it, then as now, no matter what speeches or writings emanated from the leadership, became apparent in its blinding clarity".¹¹

It was obvious that his attempt to rethink Marxism and indeed his project for a political language and a political subjectivity outside the confines of the dominant semantic paradigm of the communist tradition was the result of a profound existential frustration and disillusionment. His early work was focused on the systematic critique of bureaucracy will lead him in the next decade to the discovery of the project of "proletariat's autonomy". Within this context he will criticise traditional Marxism for its "rationalised bureaucratic thinking" as perpetuating relations of domination and dependence; and, in the

9 Castoriadis, C. 1988, *ib.*, p. 52.

10 Castoriadis, C. 1988, *ib.*, p. 4.

11 Castoriadis, C. 1988, *ib.*, p. 4.

fifties, he will start exploring the content of socialism by investigating the “psychological structures of individuals”.¹² It would be extremely interesting to follow this process of reconstructing the new way of thinking he formed within a post-Marxist conceptual paradigm, as it was accelerated by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the discussions about the nature of the state in the Soviet Union.

From that point in time, Castoriadis would relocate the project of autonomy from the proletariat and the socialist party to the mental formation of individuals acting consciously in voluntary associations for the reimagining of their society. Historical change and revolution for him became associated with “the *positing* of a new type of behaviour, . . . the *institution* of a new social rule, . . . the *invention* of a new object or a new form—in short, . . . an emergence or a production which cannot be deduced on the basis of a previous situation”.¹³ From the deterministic and positivist theories of orthodox Marxism, as elaborated by the very few noticeable Greek Marxist thinkers of the period, Castoriadis moved to the exploration of the imponderable actions that shape history unexpectedly and give a new orientation to its course, based on the individual and collective experience of concrete history. However, before going beyond the restricted confines of his Marxist intellectual formation, the young Castoriadis was exposed to a completely opposite way of thinking which can also be seen in the texts we translate here.

The Other Side of Thinking

In his trajectory towards a deep and fundamental critique of bureaucracy and of bureaucratic institutions Castoriadis had to explore concurrently and simultaneously another intellectual movement, which must have brought him to an overt conflict with his comrades. Since his early youth, Castoriadis belonged to another group of thinkers and intellectuals who had formed the official state ideology of the country especially after 1930. The following translated texts, despite their overt “revolutionary” character and “belligerent” rhetoric, are proofs of the rather *antinomic origin* of Castoriadis’s ideas. The first text translated here entitled “Directions of the Journal Sociological and Ethical Archive” encapsulates the discussions of a deeply diverse group of intellectuals. The dominant figure amongst them seems to have been Konstantinos

¹² Castoriadis, C., 1988, *ib.*, p. 307.

¹³ Castoriadis, Cornelius, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Polity Press: Cambridge, pp. 3 and 44.

Despotopoulos, (b. 1913) a liberal-idealist philosopher whom Castoriadis held to the highest possible esteem and dedicated to him one of his most significant later essays “*as a small gift, in return for everything . . .*”¹⁴

Indeed, Despotopoulos is a contradictory and paradoxical match for Stinas; the offspring of a wealthy upper class family from Smyrna, in modern Turkey, shared with Castoriadis the common bond of the generation that grew up in Greece during this period: the bond of being refugees from their place of origin. The trauma of displacement and exile can be detected in the creative output and thinking of the period following the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922—and it is an experience that still needs to be explored for the better understanding of Castoriadis’ psychological and intellectual formation. This trauma can be detected in his later philosophy of the existential indeterminacy, or indeed homelessness, of the contemporary individual. This feeling could have been enhanced by the effects of the expulsion on his family; Gerasimos Haritopoulos gives some useful information about his family history. After 1922, “his mother Sophia suffered a mental illness, probably schizophrenia, and died in Athens during the German occupation. [...] He didn’t get along with his father to the degree that during the war he preferred to work for the Red Cross in order to be independent from him”.¹⁵ It seems that the young Castoriadis lacked solid and stable foundations at home—an absence that he filled with intense studies and the constant pursuit of knowledge: he was allowed entry at the university at the age of sixteen, something unprecedented in the annals of tertiary education until then. Psychologically, the family estrangement would lead him to the quest of strong paternal figures who, when found, became his points of reference in the post-Catastrophe chaotic world of the Athenian reality. Both Stinas and Despotopoulos were the two major charismatic figures invested with authority and prestige that were to play the defining role for his psychological maturation.

Despotopoulos belonged to a group of intellectuals, formed around the Neo-Kantian right-wing Constantine Tsatsos (1899–1987) and the liberal centrist sociologist Panayiotis Kanellopoulos (1902–1986). They had both studied under Heinrich Rickert in Heidelberg and early in their intellectual formation were shaped by his Neo-Kantian concept of “ideal types” which also had played a crucial role in the conceptual system of Max Weber’s sociology. After Heidelberg, Kanellopoulos studied Philosophy of Law and Political sciences

14 Castoriadis, Cornelius, 2007, *Figures of the Thinkable*, Arnold, Helen (Trans) Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, p. 1.

15 Haritopoulos, Gerasimos, 2004, *Cornelius Castoriadis, A Critical Survey of his thought*, Ypsilon Books: Athens, p. 26.

at the University of Munich. Upon his return to Greece, in collaboration with Tsatsos and the most significant Platonist philosopher in Greece Ioannis Theodorakopoulos, they established the famous journal *Archive of Philosophy and Theory of Sciences* [*Archeion Philosophias kai Theorias ton Epistimon*] (1929–1940). It is in the pages of this journal and the intellectual dialogues it hosted that we can locate Castoriadis' discovery of Max Weber whose work seems to have played a defining role in his intellectual emancipation from all organised revolutionary movements and, in the long term, to the formation of his social philosophy.

As Castoriadis mentions in the second essay presented here, he became first aware of Weber's work, through the translation of his essay "Science as a Vocation" by the most important Greek classical scholar of the twentieth century Ioannis Sykoutris (1901–1937). Sykoutris, whose creative and ingenious preoccupation with ancient Greek texts, namely Aristotle's *Poetics* and Plato's *Symposium*, must have played a considerable role in Castoriadis's understanding of classical Greek philosophy, published a long, "exceptional", according to the young Castoriadis, introduction to the work of Weber. In 1936, Kanellopoulos published his first article on modern theories of history comparing and contrasting Max Weber and Heinrich Rickert. In another more comprehensive article, in 1936, in the pages of the same journal, Kanellopoulos presented a long discussion of contemporary theories of politics, society and history, with special emphasis on Karl Marx, Georg Lukacs, Karl Mannheim, Hans Freyer, Alfred Weber and Max Weber. The journal remained throughout its publication one of the central platforms for cultural, political and sociological debates—and by all means it became the first contact that the young prodigy Castoriadis had with the wider conversations of the period. (Castoriadis already knew French, German and English by the age of seventeen.)

In order to combat communism and discuss the ongoing social and intellectual crisis following 1922, most contributors to the journal articulated agendas of liberal social philosophies based on classical German liberalism, presenting them as alternatives to both Communism and Fascism. In local terms, they associated German academic thought with the ancient Greek political thinking, since the interpretation of the classics had a crucial ideological function for the official state apparatuses. Consequently they formulated a dual neo-classical vision of an ethnocentric Greek culture, based either on the idealistic values of Hegel's interpretation of ancient Greece, despite their pronounced Kantianism especially by Tsatsos, or based on a neo-Platonic quasi-spiritualistic revival, as espoused by Theodorakopoulos.

One member of this group was the ethereal *esthète* poet and essayist Demitrios Kapetanakis (1912–1944) who later moved to England and became

well known there (through his erotic bond with the poet and publisher John Lehmann) until his life was cut short by leukaemia; his studies on Marcel Proust, Arthur Rimbaud, Fyodor Dostoevsky and especially his Platonic extravaganza *The Mythology of Beautiful* (1937) and the lyrical effusions of *Eros and Time: A Chapter of Erotic Philosophy* (1939) were extremely influential during this period in the circles of the young Castoriadis. Another important member of the same circle, to whom Castoriadis makes explicit positive references, was the poet Yiorgos Sarantaris (1908–1941) whose existentialist essay, *The Presence of Man* (1938) based on Søren Kierkegaard and Fyodor Dostoevsky, appears to have impressed Castoriadis even as late as 1988, when he praises the “authenticity” of his ideas. Finally, to these names one must also add that of Nobel Prize Laureate (1979) Odysseus Elytis whom Castoriadis does not mention but was a member of the inner circle of the group, as well as the name of Nikos Kazantzakis whose long poem the *Odyssey* (1939) Castoriadis mentions in a rather ambivalent way and even uses it as a bad example of creative language in the post-script of the Greek translation of his major book *The Imaginary Institution of Society*.

These were some of the intellectuals of the group which was predominantly conservative and politically rather against Castoriadis’ Trotskyist commitment and definitely against everything that Stinas stood for. Castoriadis joined the group as a young man of twenty years old, although he had encountered Despotopoulos already since the late thirties, as he was accepted to the University of Athens when he was only seventeen. During the Metaxas Dictatorship (1936–1941) and the German Occupation (1941–1944) the group met regularly and discussed amongst other issues, the relevance of ancient Greek culture and especially of the Athenian Democracy to the post-war political reconstruction. Despotopoulos was a liberal socialist who became professor of Law at the University of Athens, but in 1947 was dismissed because of his pro-Soviet ideas and was exiled on the barren island of Makronisos until 1950. Throughout his long life, he remains a staunch liberal and advocate of freedom of conscience; his philosophy is a strange fusion of critical rationalism and Platonic idealism, while his literary essays explored, in a way that brings to mind Castoriadis’ interpretation of Sappho on the individuating effects of the “primordial indivisible polysemy”¹⁶ of language as a mode of self-representation—especially his essays on the Greek poets Kostis Palamas and Nikos Kazantzakis. Castoriadis seemed not to have forgotten Despotopoulos’s literary essay on Kazantzakis, as late as 1988, when these essays were reprinted and talks about them in the notes we translate here.

16 Castoriadis, C. 2007, ib., p. 43.

What impressed the young Castoriadis was the astonishing knowledge and critical acumen exhibited by Despotopoulos in the interpretation of classical Greek philosophy, contemporary legal theory and modern politics. At the same time he discovered through him the centrality of a vision for direct democracy, individual agency and existential autonomy. As a philosopher of law also, Despotopoulos struggled to articulate a legal theory of human autonomy within the conceptual paradigms and the institutional practices of liberal democracies. Unlike Stinas, whose ideas about the individual were based on a rather "closed" understanding of social position and "class" in the narrow Marxist sense of being "mere reflections" of social position, Despotopoulos's ideas were focused on the potential free agency of the individual and its ethical obligation to combat social injustice in all levels of human activity, even against its own survival instincts. Drawing from Aristotle's practical philosophy, Despotopoulos elaborated a theory of ethical responsibility within the confines of modern institutional legitimacy; towards this he formulated conditions for actual civil intervention, in what he called "praxeology," exploring the specific cases in which human praxis could express each individual as an autonomous agent for change. The real question behind his exploration under the specific historical circumstances was the question of change through revolution and if it could be philosophically legitimised. Indeed the question of change as sudden rupture from the existing order of things was to become one of the major political and ontological postulates in the philosophy of Castoriadis.

The mind of the young Castoriadis was formed between the incongruous and hostile positions presupposed by his two mentors. Stinas's idea that "True democracy has ceased to exist on the planet since when the active citizen of an autonomous community became the obedient subject of any political, religious etc. power",¹⁷ practically formed during the German occupation, must have been quite early incorporated in the conceptual semantics and the historiography of Castoriadis. Its philosophical implications were that modern people are socialised within communities that instil them with self-perceptions of heteronomy, inferiority and subjection—and idea that later he will explore through psychoanalysis.

On the other hand, Castoriadis' mind, implicitly throughout his life until he formulated his own philosophy on human autonomy, seems that have been close to Despotopoulos's idea about "the cultural creativity" of the human mind and his belief in human "autoteleia", a concept which can be also understood and translated as autonomy. Despotopoulos stated that: "the true *autoteleia* of

17 Stinas, A., 1985, *ib.*, p. 58.

man in regard to its society doesn't certainly mean that the social determination is non-existent; it simply means that certain aspects of man, especially the most essential of all, can never be deduced from its society. These are the biological and psychic manifestations which in themselves are never identified with social expressions; then follow the manifestations of expression and of cultural creativity which in their essential aspect contain mostly psychic and semantic determinations and finally the absolute consolidation of its consciousness and the absolute purposefulness of its mission".¹⁸ Castoriadis' concepts of "autogestion" and "self-management" are also related to the essential meaning of the term *autotelic* as having a purpose within its own self and not apart or outside from it; in a sense also, Castoriadis' suggestion about creation *ex nihilo* refers to the irreducibility of the human creative activity to its contextual and environmental realities.

Despotopoulos concludes this rather convoluted passage as follows: "All social activities therefore, are not consisted only from social elements, that is to say elements with solely social origination: despite the fact that they are in their purpose exclusively social, they are mixed in their construction. Many of their constituent elements are typical and uniform results of social influences, under inscrutable nevertheless continuities and convergences of social manifestations; yet there exist in them elements that they totally original, unique and individuated".¹⁹ The conflict between structures and the individual, between heteronomy and autonomy, was already mapped out in these badly written philosophical essays by Despotopoulos. Castoriadis' more elaborate, equally bad and hastily written exploration of such principles has its origins in those conversations that were taking place during the German occupation; during such circumstances of urgency and danger, dominant conceptual frameworks and political ideologies were suspended and individuals had to think for themselves through such ideologies but at the same time somehow against them. In such constitutive ambivalence towards theoretical legitimacy, enhanced in his case by the duality of influences embodied by Stinas and Despotopoulos, we can locate the beginning of Castoriadis's radical reinterpretation of human autonomy.

Almost fifty years later, Despotopoulos wrote a cautious review of the publication of Castoriadis' *The Crossroads of the Labyrinth* (Ypsilon Books, 1991) in Greek. "I had diagnosed," he writes, "early his exceptional gift for dynamic

18 Despotopoulos, Konstantinos, 1945, *Man and Civil Society* [*Anthropos and Politeia*], Athens: Papazisis Publications, p. 6.

19 Despotopoulos, K., 1945, *ib.*, p. 6.

thinking and expression: when he appeared quiet young in 1938 in the philosophical discussions as a first year student at the Law School." And he continues: "In those years, between the Dictatorship of the 4th of August and of the German Occupation afterwards, despite the multiple hardships of the historical circumstances and the very serious responsibilities under such corresponding dangers, we were able to produce intellectual achievements of rare authenticity and creativity. From those achievements, I believe, Castoriadis drew strong incentives for his first substantial intellectual formation, early for his age but extremely mature qualitatively. After December 1945 he settled in Paris, where he lived and still lives, being an intense recipient of the intellectual trends there, while a determined debunker of their shortcomings and exaggerations, yet at the same time a participant somehow to the formation of some of them. He had from the beginning as precious qualifications and solid support his knowledge of Greek philosophy and of the Germanic spirit, together with his justified confidence in his individual intellect".²⁰

After he had emancipated himself from his Marxist origins, Castoriadis wrote that "the very history of the Greco-Western world can be viewed as the history of the struggle between autonomy and heteronomy"²¹ conclusively answering a question that was formed in his mind so many decades earlier in his first essays. More than that, Castoriadis' ideas were formed under a duality of influences and discursive practices. His philosophical subjectivity was shaped by two hostile conceptual paradigms based on opposing valuation theories, conceptual paradigms and social practices. The one belonged to the political discourse of the time as expressed in the orthodox Marxism of the period, especially in the works of Pantelis Pouliopoulos and the pamphlets of Agis Stinas. The other was grounded to the high linguistic registers of the Neo-Kantian and Neo-Platonic rhetoric, that dominated philosophical thinking in Greece at that time. In his own philosophical language there can be detected a profound structural *disemia*, a philosophical bilingualism, which always raised questions of functionality, commensurability and translatability. It also led to the artificial dilemma about early and later Castoriadis, whereas the distinction is only erroneous, if we study closer his early essays.

20 Despotopoulos, Konstantinos, October 10th, 1991, Review of *The Crossroads of the Labyrinth*, Nea Estia, no. 1542, p. 1333.

21 Castoriadis, Cornelius, 1991, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, Essays in Political Philosophy*, Ames Curtis David (Ed.), Oxford University Press: New York-Oxford, p. 88.

Castoriadis' Conceptual *Disemia*

Michael Herzfeld introduced the concept of *disemia* talking about Greek culture in general expressed through the conceptual antinomies invented as rhetorical tropes dealing with the Greek position between East/West, a problem which had bedevilled Greek cultural expression and philosophical thinking. If we extend the notion of *disemia* to include not only rhetorical tropes, and linguistic registers, or indeed cultural mentalities, but also conceptual frameworks, world-views and philosophical enterprises, Castoriadis' early essays take on a new meaning in his attempt to synthesise coexisting and yet contradictory patterns of conceptualisation. As so aptly Herzfeld noted: "Disemia is the expressive play of opposition that subsists in all the varied codes through which collective self-display and self-recognition can be balanced against each other".²² Castoriadis' essays precisely work on this model of binary oppositions (Kantian vs. Marxist, yet Kantian plus Marxist, as he called later in his comments) and his determined attempt to create spaces of converging semantics.

His early work is a challenging amalgam of Kant and Marx fused together via Weber: the mix is really interesting and ambitious, based on what is predominantly missing from the main precepts of their work; however it indicates the trend towards critical reflection about each one of the given conceptual paradigms, especially in a period of conceptual re-orientation in philosophy, as it was happening with the analytic philosophy in England or the existentialist thinking in France, while of course the heavy shadow of Martin Heidegger can be felt all over the philosophy of the period without his name ever being mentioned. From the beginning of Castoriadis' philosophical thinking, the question of politics and social engagement was closely connected with the possibility for the thinking individual to become autonomous, freed from the dogmatic shackles of the rhetorical practices that articulated its conscious self during the years of its psychological formation. Later the project of autonomy was associated with a specific *ontology of change* which Castoriadis elaborated after he discarded Marxism, rejected structuralism and explored psychoanalysis. It was not an impressionistic eclecticism or anarchic pastiche of ideas: it represented his changing understanding about the limits of certain conceptual frameworks to encapsulate the diversity and the multifariousness of the social sphere and within it, of the unique unpredictability and indeterminacy of every individual.

22 Herzfeld, Michael, 1997, *Anthropology through the Looking Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p. 114.

Probably also the main philosophical trend criticised and indeed totally rejected is the implied logic of determinism and positivism. In his comments of 1988, he makes it more obvious while in his early essays struggle to confront what was a common trope in all Marxist thinking of the period and what distinguished the Marxists from the bourgeois thinkers after World War I. His attempt is expressed with his notes on the translation of Max Weber's texts and the conscious reflection on the ability of Greek language to articulate a philosophical project. One cannot simply claim that it was conscious: in many occasions the question of *disemic* discourses can be seen in his constant attempt to translate notions from one language to another. The question of translatability is raised at the last part of his essay on Max Weber, since there Castoriadis had to deal with the current position of the Greek language as a philosophical space. Throughout his life, and it seems that a study of his bilingualism and biculturalism would be something to reveal important aspects of his work, Castoriadis grappled with what could transcend the cultural and linguistic barriers of its origins and be transmitted and transpositioned on another semantic and cultural territory. We can see the same effort in his late attempts to re-interpret ancient Greek philosophy and poetry into the idiom of dynamic modernity, beyond the *detemporalisation* that we see in the hands of Martin Heidegger and his disciples, or the complete and utter *rhetorisation* that we find in the works of most postmodernists.

In the Greek translation of his magnum opus *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1978), Castoriadis added an appendix with a very substantial Glossary in his attempt to revive ancient Greek terms which were lost in the modern form of Greek. Indeed here his early opinion that there is no philosophy without infinitive finds its most interesting expression, as he employs a wide variety of ancient Greek infinitives, from the Pre-Socratics in particular, which make his philosophical statement flexible, elegant and pregnant with meanings. The words themselves lead him to a theory about the philosophical nature of Greek language, and of its translatable character through the constant creation of new conceptual potentialities. He states:

After the Greek people created—and gave to others—philosophy (as well as politics and democracy), they remained for over fifteen centuries without philosophy. They created philosophy means inextricably: they created the philosophical language and the language of thought, or even better: they created their language as language containing and gestating with philosophical questions and thinking. A language that produces *pragma* from *pratto*; in which the verb *phainomai* traverses the full semantic semi-circle starting from: “shine from within an indisputably

self-illuminated presence” to its diametrically opposite: “I simply appear, but factually I don’t exist”; in which to *judge* initially means to “separate”; in which *logos*, besides its innumerable other senses, links the “content” of thought and its “linguistic expression” with the “ability” of the human being to speak and think—examples which easily fill many pages and their discussion many volumes. Such a language is, in a way, already potentially philosophy.²³

It is interesting also that in the same text Castoriadis refers to some of the names we find in his early essays, like Nikos Kazantzakis for example, and uses certain expressions and terms similar to those used by Despotopoulos in his early works. Obviously this was not only a gesture towards his Greek readers, but also an attempt to reconnect with his own past raising issues of meaning, translatability and reconceptualisation. In his notes, throughout the text, Castoriadis brings to the attention of his readers some themes which were rediscussed later in his work, as for example the historicity of intelligible meanings, which he later reformulated as imaginary significations and the idea that each individual thinks of what is made possible by the era it abides, which later he recast as “patterns of the thinkable”. This gives a very interesting consistency to the development of his philosophy, and to a certain degree undermines the distinction between an early and a later Castoriadis. It seems that in these essays Castoriadis leaves many issues unexplored while promising to deal with them “further down” as he repeatedly states.

Such openness, indeed leaving questions to an inviting conceptual abeyance is one of the most important elements of these essays: what they struggle to do is to create a convergence of signifiers, which, it must be said, are not entirely compatible with each other. It is obvious that the young Castoriadis, between 1945 and 1960, abandoned his promethean project for both practical and theoretical reasons; first because of the historical circumstances of the period and then because he lacked the necessary terminological precision in order to delineate the incommensurable conceptual spaces within his own thinking. As they stand, the early texts try to re-invent Max Weber’s theory of social sciences by stressing its Kantian principles. They don’t insist on any class interpretation of society, despite the occasional references to the bourgeois domination. In a sense, the young Castoriadis sees society as an interlinked web of abstract relations, which form a total and opaque mental universe imposed upon the individual through the dominant social order, without however annulling its ability to critically reflect on its own structure. Obviously

23 Castoriadis, Cornelius, 1978, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Halikias, S., Spandidakis, Y., Spandidakis, K., (Trans), Kedros Publications: Athens, p. 519.

in these early essays he didn't pursue with the examination of such critical reflection and the actions that would make any change possible. They are innovative however in the sense that they go beyond the Weberian "iron cage" and "limitless rational mastery" over the natural world by positing, in an embryonic form, the project of imagining a different and new future for the individual and its society. The principle of imagining has acquired a permanent significance early in his intellectual biography.

In that sense, Weber's theory became for him the beginning for the critical exploration of social institutions and the mechanisms through which they occlude the project of change by conditioning in a restrictive way the mental formation of the individual. The central word which is repeated in all its forms time and again especially in his own *Theory of Social Sciences* is "potentially"—the potentiality of imagining a different world and acting towards its creation is probably the most important underlying thread in his early thinking which will be re-articulated in different forms in his thinking after he left Greece. Later he succeeded in synthesising the conflicting conceptual realms of his early essays and from a *disemic* thinker he evolved into a *polysemic* philosopher—a philosopher whose philosophical language because of its variety of sub-scripts and diversity of potential references is characterised by a trans-cultural universality and relevance.

One of the most persistent theoretical principles in Despotopoulos's political philosophy is that each individual is an "*autaxia*", a self-valorising entity, which is restricted by the "*heterokathorismos*" (*hetero-determinism*) imposed by social institutions. According to Despotopoulos, the purpose of the legislator, after socialism will be implemented and the economic problem would have been solved, is to "be elevated to the realm of freedom having first confronted in a creative way the infinity and the grandeur of the human mission".²⁴ On the other hand Castoriadis' ideological mentor Stinas had a similar vision about socialism when he talked about "the revolution, which means the autonomous invasion of the working class into the realm where its destiny is to be formed".²⁵

It also seems that Castoriadis' vision about the potential self-invention of the individual through such an "autonomous invasion" is a fusion of idealistic and utopian beliefs during the formative years of his thinking. Kant, Marx and Weber coexisted in his early thinking in an uneasy way that was to be resolved only later when Castoriadis' project of autonomy became an *autaxia* in itself, in an act of a radical reconciliation between the originary constituents of his thought.

24 Despotopoulos, K., 1945, ib. p. 41.

25 Stinas, Agis, 1984, *EAM-HELLAS-OPLA*. International Library: Athens, p. 39.

PART 1

Essays by Cornelius Castoriadis



Author's Introduction to the Publication of the 1988 Edition

Cornelius Castoriadis

Translated by Vrasidas Karalis and Anthony Stephens

The texts in this volume—my first ever published texts—originate from one single issue, number 2, of the journal *Archive of Sociology and Morality*, [*Archeion Koinoniologyias kai Ithikis*] which was released in the Spring of 1944. After the first miserable issue, I was asked to take over as the editor of the journal. The result was this 2nd issue which also included, besides my texts, essays by K. Despotopoulos¹ and M. Kranaki.² Shortly after its release, an operative petty coup took place and one day I saw issue number 3 of the *Archive*, without even knowing that it was to be published. I think that that issue was also the last.

Why this new edition? I think that all those who are interested in my later work will find in these writings of a twenty two year old young man (*nos vingt-deux carats*, as the French song goes...) the problematic whose intensity defined the whole of my subsequent trajectory. First of all, certainly, the question of politics, and the awareness of the need for a radical social change, the faith in the creativity of the large masses of people, and the central character of the democratic project. Equally also, they will find my philosophical quest: how we can think about society and history and, starting with this: what we can think about our relations, as human beings, together with the “objects” that surround us (and constructs us) as well as about the “ideas” that determine these relations. This quest is already formulated in some of its salient elements, according to my perception, in these writings of 1944; reading them again, after this reprint, I frequently found myself forced to pause and reflect. Maybe it wouldn't be arrogant to hope that the same may happen with younger reader.

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- 1 Konstantinos Despotopoulos, one of the most important intellectuals who influenced Castoriadis's development. (More about him in the Notes on his Essays).
 - 2 Mimika Kranaki (1922–2008) an important intellectual, writer and psychoanalyst, a close friend of Castoriadis; they both belonged to the “lost generation” of Greek thinkers who immigrated to France after 1945. In her novel *Philhellenes* (1993) she described the destiny of the Greek intellectual diaspora and the questions of identity they dealt with. Her relations with Castoriadis didn't remain amicable till the end.

Certainly, since 1944 to this day, my ideas and perspectives had evolved. The milestones of my development can be found in my various books, which now have been published in Greek, thanks to Ypsilon Publications. Especially, in regard to matters of social theory and philosophy, I would like to refer to *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, *The Crossroads of the Labyrinth* (volume I) and *Spaces of the Human* (*The Crossroads of the Labyrinth*, volume II), which will be published soon by the same publications.

The points on which I thought that my current ideas are different to what I wrote in 1944, incited me to add some brief comments, indicated by the date 1988.

Cornelius Castoriadis

Paris, September 14th, 1987

Directions of the Journal *Sociological and Ethical Archive*

Cornelius Castoriadis

Translated by Vrasidas Karalis and Anthony Stephens

The publication of this issue of the *Sociological and Ethical Archive* [*Archeio Koinoniologias kai Ithikis*] in this time of warfare requires some justification as to its purposes. The new editorial committee, which has taken over the administration of the *Archive* from this issue onwards, feels the strong obligation to present the reasons which convinced its members to take on this onerous and thankless task, continuing the journal's publication despite the present adverse ethical conditions and the depressing legacy of the first issue.

As a rule, every human action is not simply, but, at any event, decisively co-determined by the historical circumstances in which it takes place—by the diverse positions and the intensity of the forces which drive history and the contemporary form of (its?) patterning. Recognition of this circumstance disqualifies, from the outset, every action as utopian and groundless which, despite any free goals it might set itself, does not embark from the necessary, albeit incomplete, assessment of the current historical situation and the indispensable awareness of the position of the consciousness within it. For this contrast may even supersede such historical trends whose relevance is, none the less, beyond question. By affirming the moral inevitability of such a position, the editorial committee of the journal summaries in advance its specific content as follows:

Both the current war and the calamities that result from it are merely one stage in the struggle of humanity to liberate itself from parochial forms of social life, a struggle which continues primarily because of the stagnation of consciousness, especially that of the masses, with regard to technology. The current, theoretical and practical collapse of society is taking place because of the antinomy created by the unequal development of sections of the overall energy of society; such a collapse manifests itself as the promotion, at no unitary pace, of technological dynamism. This applies both to the theoretical

* Editor's Note: See Castoriadis' 'Authors Introduction to the Publication of the 1988 reprint' and 'Translators' Note' by Vrasidas Karalis and Anthony Stephens.

understanding of that social reality that will consequently be transformed and also, in social practice, as the regulation of economic, political and cultural forms, homologous to the technological basis and the teleologies of quotidian existence.

1988: Today I would no longer describe the current misfortunes of humanity as resulting from “the stagnation of consciousness, especially that of the masses, with regard to technology”. The present crisis is the result of the continuing extension of the (presumably) rationalised (presumed) mastery over nature and humanity. Contemporary technology is the foremost embodiment and instrument of this imaginary signification. Today it still dominates the social “consciousness”, whereas that other central imaginary signification in the framework of Greco-Occidental history, namely the project of social and individual autonomy, has gone into a prolonged eclipse. The wording of the 1944 text derives from both Kant and Marx. Similarly Marxist is the later formulation that “the antinomy within social activities [...] constitutes the objective guarantee for the transition to a new stage of historical life free from such contradictions”. There can be no objective guarantees in history, as there are no “ends in history”—nor indeed “any rational determinism in history” which might “force the great mass of people towards self-consciousness”. There is only the imaginary creation we desire, and we must assist this creation to reclaim its inspiration and values of autonomy.

That same antinomy within social activities, which may destroy at any moment the real basis of those social forms that have hitherto remained intact by crushing history in material terms, constitutes the objective guarantee for the transition to a new stage of historical life free from such contradictions. For any such transition will be effected only when human creative activity, intervening catastrophically but also constructively in the realm of history, shall regulate the form and the content of social life in an internal harmony. An intervention of this nature presupposes an understanding of the objective problematic outlined above together with its subjective transcendence, since this constitutes the prime duty of any human who attains self-awareness. For the consciousness of each one of us—since social life as we know it came into existence—obviously cannot be the product of one or two heroic individuals but only of the great mass of humanity which, confronted by the merciless dilemma of understanding or facing death, is forced towards self-awareness by the definite rational determinism of history. This directs in turn, by different paths, the most important representatives of the theoretical and practical endeavour of the era towards the same ends. Such a synthesis of the conscious and the spontaneous, of the free and the determined elements, leads history towards its necessary and correct formulation.

Dealing with both theoretical and practical social problems is the work of the whole of any given society. Principally, however, it creates duties for the responsible representatives of all intellectual cultivation, regardless of how isolated they may be or in which insular category they may belong. Politicians and sociologists—such distinctions are schematic—must be moderated and assisted especially by those who find themselves dedicated to an intellectual life. Taking over any scientific, technological or any other intellectual function results in heavy duties for them. Their tasks include a responsible and complete resolution of present issues and a safeguarding against future problems. They have an accountability to the people and should provide guidance for them.

The *Archive* appears in order to re-address social theoretical and practical problems within the circle of the existing cultural institutions in our era and our land (taken its widest possible sense). Now we must determine: the concrete content of the mission, the way in which it will address spatial and temporal conditions and, as a consequence of all these, the formation of its content.

1988: In the following chapters we constantly speak of the “social sciences”. Using the term “science” in this sense is legitimate only if it is made clear that a real abyss separates the “social sciences” from what we today usually term “sciences” (namely both “positive” and “exact” sciences). Essentially for the same reason, there can be no “system” of social sciences founded on the “categorical complex”.

Mission

- I. First purpose: research into the complexity of the theoretical problems relating to social life. We must emphasise:
 1. The need for the methodological and cognitive clarification of what “research” means, that is: the need for a theory of social sciences. Here we must stress the correct assessment of the social and class attachment of the ontological gaze as a special problem of extreme importance. We must investigate with precision not only the degree of such attachment and its significance, but also the conditions of our probable liberation from it and therefore of the significance of its understanding.
 2. The need not only of promoting, but of systematically reconstructing the social sciences, that is: the addition to the total sum of social knowledge of the categorical complexity that will raise them to the

status of a system. The unity of the historico-social world—not a simple idea, but a reality yet to be attained—demands the logical unity of its sciences.

- II. At the same time, social life also raises the practical problems of its correct formation. These also constitute the rational precondition of the theoretical problems, since theory is merely the formation of life which demands (a peculiar) correctness. A correct formation of social life is possible only given the objective precondition of universal duty and the subjective precondition of freedom as the forces driving its understanding and realisation.
 1. In this concrete historical moment and with regard to the ends of history, on one hand, and the technological potentialities of society, on the other, the universal duty of social life assumes the specific content: the life of all people can achieve optimal completeness. This universal duty becomes specialised according to its relevance to different aspects of social life. Consequently, in the economic sphere the duty we have is to offer to all the material preconditions of life as secured by contemporary technological advancement; in the civic sphere it is to raise all to the status of active subjects for attaining political power, and in the realm of pure civilisation to grant to all the objective possibility of participating in its production according to their individual ability and to enhance such ability to a greater extent than is usually considered possible.
 2. This universal duty cannot become reality without the precondition of freedom; freedom does not mean subjective arbitrariness but rather self-awareness, a correct ideological orientation and the power of self-control. As such it is the necessary precondition for every correct position, even of the most purely theoretical.
 3. The last but equally important stage of practical thinking is the choice of means which will lead to the realisation of ends. From this point, the correct assessment of the specific reality becomes more than anything else decisive for complete action.
- III. Reaction has brought about a confused over-emphasis of beliefs from the previous century. These relate to the distinction between the theoretical and practical (ontological and de-ontological) method and sphere of thought which led to an insulated division of these two methods, with completely negative results. Depriving the theory of moral duty of any

ontological foundation resulted in the creation of a philosophy intended to be practical but totally separated from reality. (An example is the idealistic philosophy of justice which remained a mere method or, at best, a theory of the categories of civic life instead of embodying substantial practical reason, politics stripped bare of all philosophy) Moreover, the deontological exemption of social sciences, by taking away the categorical structure, caused their ossification and collapse into collections of information about heterogeneous subjects. Two concepts are to be pursued in order to achieve the reunification of theory with action:

1. Concretely: as a mutual evaluation, based on the fact that every theory a) subjectively presupposes action (theory is also a practical position); b) by all means, talking about social sciences, it has as its subject-matter, the acting itself, the social acting; c) cannot normally attain its theoretical goal except through the scrutiny of action (experiment, observation); d) does not serve, since it refers to the social world (since it is a science), nothing but the action of humans (since it is only a temporary under refutation system of depictions and beyond that only a closed tautological system) and is furthermore based on the fact that every action a) is conscious (because it is an action and not a natural activity), presupposes therefore subjective theory, b) cannot reach any certain end but only supported by theory, but more specifically, g) cannot reach the correctness of purpose except supported by the correct theory.
2. Philosophically. The historical world is the place where being ceases to be naked being and duty simply duty, and where ideas are posited as a reality and necessity as freedom. This interrelation of two purposes constitutes the subject matter of the philosophy of history.

1988: It is true, in a sense, that "the historical world is the place . . . where the idea is posited as reality and necessity as freedom"—providing it is understood that idea and freedom are both human creations.

Conclusion: The pursuit of the subjective liberation of scientific research, its methodological elucidation and systematic reconstruction; conquest of the practical sphere in its opposition to the theoretical but simultaneously as the founding of another sphere, given, in each case, a strict distinction between methods, processing of objective and subjective problems of duty; pursuit of the necessary final synthesis of these poles and their corresponding methods.

Adjustment to Spatio-Temporal Conditions

1. Any scientific theory or political belief cannot emphasise too strongly the fact that it is created or formulated in 1944. This imposes on it the following main duties:
 2. The duty of effecting the absolute fusion and assimilation of the previous creation, or the creation from elsewhere, through the resuscitation of its dual elements: the supra-temporal, that is: the one that constitutes a single moment of the part of a contradiction which permanently dominates the spiritual world, and the intra-temporal, that is: the one which is potentially included in the subsequent expansion of the problem.
 3. The duty of creation, that is: of the expansion of the theoretical and the practical movement of the spirit, or at least of non-regression in the questions and of the feeling of superfluousness.
- I. The concrete formation of Greek reality dictates certain claims on the circulation of the *Archive*. Here it must be underlined:
1. The specific importance for us of Greek reality as both theoretical and practical subject-matter. As is self-evident, both actual Greek reality and its correct organisation already constitute problems of special importance for Greek social scientists because of the global distribution of labour.
 2. The need for a correct assessment of Greek scientific and philosophical development, which also requires pedagogical adjustment. As permanent characteristics of the Greek spiritual environment, the non-existence of any justification and contextualisation of a general world-view, one-sidedness, the absence of modernisation, a connection with the past and orientation towards the future, spiritual anaemia, ethical impoverishment must be mentioned briefly and demonstratively.
- In conclusion, these are imperative: grounding ourselves in the past but going beyond it, a study of Greek reality and an understanding of specific duties emanating from this environment.

Conclusions Pertaining to the Formation of Contents

1. A central part of the *Archive's* mission consists of the presentation of creative performance from the past or from elsewhere. It looks predominantly towards classical antiquity and towards contemporary foreign science, producing translations but also original studies of historical content.
2. The main part of the *Archive's* mission is consists in the promotion of the creative study of questions that are either general or specific to Greece. Such enquiries are, of course, primarily dependent on the presence of subjective strengths which cannot be produced artificially or nurtured within a very short span of time. The strengths of the *Archive*, the circle of its writers who are working together at this moment for the journal must be reinforced by others who work on the same questions, especially the young.
3. Another significant part of the *Archive's* mission is the strict objective critique of scientific and philosophical work conducted at this moment in Greece. The concept of such a mission imposes extremely severe obligations on the *Archive*; their fulfilment presupposes discussions that work towards a synthesis over an immense number of specialised scientific and general philosophical questions, and—even more importantly—of political questions of extreme urgency. The challenge is so great that both the absolute and the relative success of its mission are cast into doubt. Within a history in which purity of intentions serves, in the case of failure, only to incriminate rather than exonerate, the editorial board of the *Archive* remains fully aware of the heavy burden on their shoulders. For this reason, it appeals to all those who understand the need for the publication of such a journal with this request: to exercise the most severe critique of its contents. This will assist it to reduce the accumulation of errors and will enhance its collaborative scope.

With this orientation and self-knowledge the *Archive* enters upon its new period.

On the Work of Max Weber

Cornelius Castoriadis

Translated by Vrasidas Karalis and Anthony Stephens

The following excerpt is the “methodological” introduction to Max Weber’s great work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen, 1921). It contains the basic and most distinctly rational foundations of all scientific research into social phenomena; it was reprinted, with its current title, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, Tübingen, 1922, pp. 502–528), the text on which this translation is based.

Max Weber was born in Erfurt in 1864. Important steps in his academic career were: 1892, associate professor of political economy in Berlin; 1894, full professor in Freiburg; 1897, professor in Heidelberg (always in the same discipline) until 1899, when he resigned due to a nervous breakdown; in 1919 he resumed the status of full professor in Munich. He died suddenly in 1920 of pneumonia. His life was untouched by sensational external events, but full of his continuous research activity, from his early doctoral dissertation *Römische Agrargeschichte* (1891), which offered an abundance of new ideas about the economic history of antiquity, up till his gigantic system of sociology in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, published posthumously.

Only one of his works was translated into Greek, “Science as a Vocation” by Ioannis Sykoutris, with an exceptional introduction (in the *Archive of Economic and Political Sciences*, vo. 12–13, Athens 1932–33 and reprinted later). There is also the brief article by Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, “Max Weber and Heinrich Rickert”, in the *Archive of Philosophy and Theory of Sciences*, vol. 4, Athens 1933, pp. 365–370). In German one can find the biography by his wife Marianne Weber, *Max Weber, Ein Lebensbild* (1926) and the brief but substantial book by Karl Jaspers, *Max Weber* (1932).

The vast scope of his work, which includes both diverse publications (books, dictionary entries, studies in journals, lectures, manuscripts) but also widely ranging contents (researches on music, the stock exchange, religion, agrarian history, the value of science and also on politics) was such that only after his

* Editor’s Note: See Castoriadis’ ‘Authors Introduction to the Publication of the 1988 reprint’ and ‘Translators’ Note’ by Vrasidas Karalis and Anthony Stephens.

death was there created, with the collected edition, the material possibility, and after the end of his life and the completion of his work, the objective condition for a total understanding of the man and his work. Finally there must be place for the subjective condition. Such an understanding must begin from the following points:

Max Weber's work seems to be dispersed, both externally and in its essence, among a plethora of questions without internal cohesion; in reality however the unshakable foundation of its unity can be found in the man, who is always the overt and sometimes the covert *telos* (= purpose) of the research. For such a work no brief synopsis can be given here, only some hints:

Max Weber provided research into the rational foundations of the social sciences with certain indispensable presuppositions: the definitive and pure concept of social meaning as the constitutive moment of the material for the social sciences; related to this was the definition of the basic mission of sociology, which is the understanding of social phenomena; the emphasis on the empirical and therefore on the deterministic character of social sciences; the formulation of necessary generalisations with the theory of ideotypes. The excerpt published here offers a clear albeit brief conspectus of all these related questions.

Equally important is the legacy of Max Weber for systematic sociology. His system of sociology (which was for him a simple exposition of the relations between economy and society) *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, in which the methodological principles mentioned above—constituting the program of “interpretive sociology” (*verstehende Soziologie*)—found a brilliant application, still represents a unique example of the combination of strict unity and cohesiveness of method with the care for the infinite diversity of historical material, together with the correct specific evaluation of the relations of categories referring to social phenomena. Concerning the first, an admirable example is Max Weber's theory of the forms of power (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 750 and in its description by P. Kanellopoulos, *The Society of our Era*, 1932, pp. 145–152).

Concerning the second, an example taken out of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*: his study *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, published now in volume I of the *Gesamelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, which contributed for the first time to the study of a specific and extremely significant case, to the solution of the problem of the creation of the necessary conditions for the emergence of capitalism in the West, and to the degree that such conditions could, together with technology, contribute decisively to and influence the development of productive relations, as branches of intellectual civilisation, in this case, religion. Weber proved scientifically that without the emergence of Lutheranism and, more specifically, Calvinism, with their spirit

of this-worldly asceticism and the interpretation of every genuine success as the indication of “choice” (by God for eternal life), the creation of the subjective psychological precondition for capitalist enterprises would have been impossible: the tendency towards the limitless expansion of wealth without any relation to the pursuit of its genuine enjoyment. Without this psychological precondition, which is due to the change of world-view (a change with its own researchable causes), technological innovation would have been unable by itself to develop capitalism; it was a creative reversal of the customary way of thinking about the relations between the technological base and the cultural superstructure.

An astonishing definitiveness—for its time—is achieved by Max Weber’s assessment of the value of science (in many studies and finally in the lecture *Wissenschaft als Beruf*). Against the shouts of the self-serving over-estimators of science, Weber, faithful as no one else to the purity of theory, defines the limits and the potentialities of science by means of a cluster of arguments which, although they had their own precedents in the history of philosophy, were now presented for the very first time with such scientific organisation and universality.

1988: Although, Max Weber’s proposals concerning the value of science constitute an inevitable and decisive stage in examining the problem, I would not claim today that they succeed in becoming definitive. Weber saw clearly and intensely the process of bureaucratisation and the enslavement of society by a constantly autonomous domination of techno-scientific pseudo-“rationalism”. However, he remained a “classicist” and a “Kantian” in regard to the “theoretical” dimension of contemporary science—which means that he overlooked the innovation imposed by the philosophical quest itself.

Theoretically, science leads us to some very peculiar ends; it has always remained closed to all those activities that are usually considered to be the most important pursuits of knowledge: science cannot lead to any conception of the totality of things; all scientific research is always specific, every theory (albeit general) has a single concrete object. The “universe” of science is not an organic whole; it is only a mechanical assemblage of fragments. Cognitive activity has fragmented the unified, unbreakable precognitive world and every attempt (which is beyond its power) to reconstitute the vital identity with itself within the irreversible flux of activities, is futile. However in all these fragments of the world known to science, its *essence* remains always unknown; at an immense distance from the (exclusively) knowable surface of things there resides the *core* of their existence; whatever we know scientifically is always only a facade.

Outside Theory, empirical science (the study of causal connections between natural and historical becoming) is never enough to give us criteria for the value of things and even less as to *what we must do*; no knowledge of what is to be done can emanate from any investigation into (empirical) being. The position of the theorist is separated by an unbridgeable gap from the position of the deontologist and the practically-minded; the only value recognised by the theorist is the value of truth and truth is the only imperative. Certainly, extremely important knowledge pertaining to action may derive from such investigations; their implementation however through action is always achieved with the precondition of a *purpose*, which deserves to be implemented and which is unknown as such to science. Even less can science as such lead (or indeed it can do so only negatively) to the founding of other values or spheres of human realisation, as for example art; on the contrary, a basic precondition for a genuine relation with art is the rejection of the "scientific" style of living.

What science offers, beyond the invaluable practical services supporting technology, is scientific truth: a truth different from metaphysical or aesthetic affirmation, which is perfectly autotelic and autonomous and also perfectly equivalent to any other value. That the same *passion* that gives meaning to any other contribution to human progress can be directed towards such a *value* was proven exemplarily by Max Weber himself in his own life.

The Human Being. The inner wealth of a man comes together inevitably with contradictions, contradictions which multiply unpredictably the potentialities for the conceptualisation of the contradictory *real*.

As a researcher, Max Weber combined the programmatic and persistent support of specialisation with a pragmatic and fruitful omnipresence within the circle of the humanities; the unprecedented acuity of polemic with the complete indifference towards individuals; the sanguine passion for research with strict objectivity; doubt as an indispensable methodological tool, as a necessary articulation of thinking, with the recognition of the imposing might of the achieved real each time.

Max Weber combined an intense life outside theory with his dedication to scientific research. Leaving aside here his relation with art (music), it was conspicuous that, in the realm of politics, his persistent commitment to the ideas he believed in never obscured in the least the clarity of his detached psychological gaze, even when he turned to the (political) confrontation with the facts. An outstanding instance of self-awareness, (a justification of why he did not commit himself completely to politics) is offered by his phrase: "*A politician must in every moment of the day and night be present and certain within himself; I cannot trust myself; I make mistakes*".

Unity. More and more the unity of the essential man ceases to be the unity of ideas and becomes the unity of *manner*, or otherwise *approach*; and once

more such an approach is ultimately defined by *a single* hypermorphic characteristic: purity. So it was with Max Weber.

A purity which is manifested in *passion* for the object, and in *detachment* as the necessary methodological precondition, in *hatred* towards everything alien towards the “thing” and in *justice* as the faculty for the recognition of what is objectively significant as opposed to what is harmful; in *the continuous and irreversible sacrifice of everything external for what is essential*; in *self-sacrifice*, with the repulsion against any greed or self-interest; in the avoidance of scientific demagoguery and in the talent for silence, which springs from the tranquil self-awareness of genius, but also in more urgent commitment, when in danger are not individual cases but the influence of values over history. Weber’s position is anchored in *the ability of failure* and in the perception of the shipwreck emanating from the persistent coexistence with death; and finally in the unreserved openness towards all expressions of a realised being.

Historical Contextualization of Max Weber’s methodology: with his emphasis on the conceptual character of the subject-matter of the social sciences (which at this point have advanced sociology to complete self-awareness for the first time) Max Weber finds his place within the great intellectual tradition which springs in modern times from classical German philosophy (specifically from Herder and Schelling in this regard) and to which all those who see the historical in opposition to the natural belong. These thinkers conceive of the science of history not as a subdivision of the natural sciences but as an equivalent branch of learning. In most of its manifestations, the Western Enlightenment, as well as positivist sociology (specifically that of Spencer), is based on the confusion between nature and history. As the first amongst others, Marx (in his *Thesen über Feuerbach* and in his *Deutsche Ideologie*) stressed the distinction between the natural and the social and elevated technology (which cannot be defined in terms other than *rationalisation*, like the instrument as the object with a certain meaning—of special nature) to the defining base of social phenomena and demonstrated their potentially conceptual foundation.

The elucidation of the conceptual character of the social (yet not its sufficient consolidation) took place at the end of last century with Dilthey (*Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*), Rickert (*Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*) but was finalised with Max Weber himself. While the first two turned their attention to the difference in the *method* of natural and historical science, Max Weber lucidly distinguished the basic characteristics of historical material from the characteristics of natural material. The historical phenomenon is always the carrier of meaning, in contrast to the natural phenomenon which is void of all meaning.

Such realisation of the conceptual character of the historical sciences, in the beginning, coincided with certain basic misunderstandings. The belief that the historical can be conceptualised only with regard to a certain meaning, a certain value, created the erroneous idea that the purpose of the science of the social world is the evaluation of the historical phenomenon, that historical sciences are, for the most part at least, evaluative (*wertende*) sciences [Rickert, ed. Meyer] or, worse still, deontological sciences [Stammler]. The hidden nerve of Max Weber's argument against all such deviations is the following: the possibility of referring to value is the constitutive precondition of the social subject-matter; the attestation of this possibility is enough to bring a phenomenon into the circle of the field of historical theorisation; however the quality (positive or negative) of such reference doesn't exercise any further influence. With the attestation of this possibility of reference to value, social science engages with its main task (which is the interpretive understanding and the causal explanation of the social phenomenon).

1988: The "constitutive precondition of the social subject-matter" is the "possibility of reference to value" as the text says—however such value is without exception a socially created and instituted value. More simply, I would claim today that the constitutive precondition of the social subject-matter is its investment with social imaginary significations. They alone determine each time what is (or what is not) socially a value. [This idea is already mentioned in my notes 2, a, I and 4, d in the translated excerpt of Weber, see below].

On the Translation: Max Weber's text, especially in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, and even more in its introductory part published here, is obscure to the reader and indifferent to expressive form; complementarily, however, it is exceptionally dense, totally precise and combines organically the penetrative sharpness of concepts with the synthetising arrangement of rational argumentation.

1988: The translated excerpt corresponds to Part I, Methodological Foundations, of Chapter One, Fundamental Sociological Concepts, Part One, Theory of Sociological categories, in the (posthumously published) great work by Max Weber Economy and Society (pp. 1–II, fourth edition, edited by J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1956). It does not include the "Introductory Note" (p. 1) where Weber comments briefly on his relation to Jaspers, Rickert, Gottl, Stammler and Simmel).

The translation could not have been undertaken without the substantial contribution of my friend Alekos Ioannidis. Under the present circumstances, it was impossible for me to go through the text in detail. Reading it again, I found it, generally speaking, satisfactory. Several terms, (for example: rational, aktuell)

I would translate differently today. See my "Glossary" in the Greek translation of the Imaginary Institution of Society (pp. 527–539).

Such a text cannot be rendered satisfactorily into the present-day demotic language, given the paratactic and not hypotactic structure of its sentences, its phrasing patterns based on verbs and not on nouns, its short sentences and the absence of terms with the necessary precision and connotations. Because of such objective weakness, and because the scientific possibility for the understanding of the excerpt was in this specific case the only substantial purpose for the translation, the translators—instead of committing themselves to the (perhaps utopian) attempt to give their translation a demotic linguistic content, aspired only to pursue the scientific precision (that is, the unambiguous correspondence between the two texts) of the translation. The extent to which they were successful is another matter. Certain points deserve special mention. In relation to certain terms, the established ones were preferred; in some other cases, where common practice offered only superfluities or inaccuracies or even nothing at all, new ones were coined, transparent to the extent it was feasible. In all instances, the corresponding German terms are listed for checking and facilitating understanding. With regard to linguistic types, we tried to keep the translation within the boundaries of the demotic grammar, without excluding a priori any not purely demotic type; the latter especially pertains to the (inevitable) use of participles and more specifically of infinitives. There is no philosophy without infinitives.

The notes (with the exception of very few purely informative instances) aim at offering a substantial commentary on the text. In some instances they present a simple interpretation, that is: the opening of a path that is easier to walk, as opposed to what seems an impregnable purpose within the text, and elucidate it by correlation with other analogous or opposite perspectives. In other instances we offer the adumbration of the foundation of what appears in the text as a series of theorems; yet in other instances we suggest the development of its potential meaning to its consequences and conclusions that necessarily follow it providing the occasional critical assessment, through the presentation of the reservations generated by the text itself. Neither the place nor the time allowed these comments the length and the depth they deserved. Perhaps one day this task could be completed.

1988. It would be meaningless, certainly, to "comment" here on the comments about Weber, included in the notes on the translation. Irrespective of the nature of their subject-matter, these comments could be endlessly expanded. There is a moment when the reader must take control—and assume responsibility.

During the time when these notes were written, and around the same or predominantly related questions, the "Introduction to the Theory of Social Sciences" was written, which was published in the same issue. In the (exceptionally frequent) cases when a topic, which belonged organically to the circle of topics of the Introduction, appeared in the notes on the translation, its discussion here was replaced by a reference to the corresponding point of the Introduction (a reference which is done simply with the word Introduction and the indication of the paragraph).

Introduction to the Theory of the Social Sciences¹

The theory of the social sciences—certainly not a branch of 'science' in the empirical sense, but rather of philosophy, and specifically of the theory of knowledge—has as its purpose research into the cognitive process within the realm of social sciences. This means that that it explores the elements which construct social science, the manner of their constitution, their systemic orientation and the validity of such construction—as well as the position of the social sciences and of societal structures within the totality of universal knowledge. In this first dimension the internal theory of social sciences is situated, in the second the external.

Science pursues the correct synthesis between form and content; a similar correct synthesis is also pursued by the theory of the sciences; however in the latter instance, content is everything in science. Furthermore, to what is concretely achieved by science, the theory of science adds self-consciousness. The shaping of a content employing a form with reference to an ideal subject-matter, which expresses their correct synthesis, a form moving within the field of the concrete—this is what the theory of science intends generally to express

¹ The present study is an introduction to and not a theory of the social sciences because a) it is frequently restricted in the simple exposition of questions and stops short of any analytic and justified solution, b) it aspires to the widest possible *intelligibility*. In many instances, my personal antipathy towards the repetition of well-known facts and the strict demands of dense scientific constructiveness have been sacrificed. Everywhere we begin with the common and self-evident presuppositions and the ascent towards general laws takes place gradually, without omitting any intermediary stops. At least this is our intention. The latter has only technical significance, while the former is also essential. The goals of the current study are a) to make all those who are dealing with similar questions conscious of the necessity for a theory of the social sciences, b) to elucidate a way of thinking appropriate to the resolution of these questions, c) to offer an orientation within these questions and their possible solutions.

in its investigation into the materiality, the morphology and the correctness of their synthesis.

Such a general and, in a sense, analytic (yet in its content tautological) work does not encapsulate the purpose of the theory of science. The theory of science strives for another ideal, totally creative: the production of axioms exiting at the basis of sciences, drawn from a central system, whose several theorems must first be proven, and the production of this primary system from a final and first proposition, the hypothetical proposition on the conditions about the possibility of knowledge. Such production is imposed by the unity of theory: either it moves in the realm of the (relatively) concrete or in the realm of generalities. Theoretical science and science cannot be separated from each other. Science is a special instance of philosophy. Science can be called science as long as it offers truth; however, by itself it cannot offer truth. For the second time after the pre-Socratics, the unity of theory, now internally diversified, transcends the intellectual horizon.

As the internal theory of science I define:

- a) The (general) analysis of the elements of science: science is a system of correct judgements. We must analyse the following: the concepts of judgement, correctness, crisis and system.
 - I. The analysis of judgement leads to the discovery that judgement is a synthesis (or the creation of a unity); the distinction between what is synthesised and the way it is synthesised—what in Neo-Kantian terminology is called matter and form—leads to the investigation of these two concepts as they appear in the specific cognitive field.
 - II. The question of the correctness of judgement devolves into the question of inventing the conditions that offer validity to such a synthesis. For this reason, the theory of science is forced to start by determining the concept of validity of the concept of truth.
 - III. However, even after such a determination is made, there remains the question: what ascribes unity to such a multitude of judgements? Consequently, a theory of science is forced to investigate the question of the systemic unity of science.
- b) The production of scientific principles: every science tends towards an ideal of creating axioms, that is: towards the production of all its propositions from the least possible number of basic propositions or axioms. In this way, it is possible to give a correct definition of truth: truth is non-contradiction within a given system of axioms. However, it becomes

immediately apparent that the question as to the truth of such axioms cannot have any definite meaning. For philosophy, however, which gives a wider meaning to the concept of truth, (as agreement with the general conditions for the possibility of knowing) such a question (on the truthfulness of axioms) is genuinely meaningful. Otherwise, it would have necessitated a fragmentation of the unity of theory (which special sciences truly ignore, yet this the foundation they have to be based on) and to accept the simultaneous validity of propositions which contradict each other (based on different systems of axioms). For science, the concept of truth can only be hypothetically determined; for philosophy it *has* to be determined categorically (see below for the peculiar characteristics of such categories). Consequently, a second more significant—because more creative—task is set for the theory of science: to produce the principles of science, which means to institute science concretely, so that it ceases to institute itself based entirely on its own axioms.

We do not need further elaboration in order to understand the concept of the external theory of science. Science can be positioned within theory, theory within the spirit, the spirit within the man. Respectively, society can be positioned with the object and the object within the essence.

1988. I still think that "theoretical philosophy and science cannot be separated from each other". Their relationship, however, is much more complex than what is expressed in this text. More specifically the idea that axioms "that exist at the foundations of sciences" which could be produced "from a central system of axioms" and that system, in its turn, "from a final and first preposition, the hypothetical preposition about the condition of the possibility of knowing" has long since been completely unacceptable. Such an idea could be conceived as a liminal and infeasible ideal (the Kantian regulative idea) or as feasible—and realised (in the Hegelian system of absolute knowledge). From my present-day point of view, both perspectives have the same origin. Both cases presuppose a unitary ontology (being is one, consubstantial, immutable, systematically constructed) as well as the homogeneity of human thinking in regard to universal being (a homogeneity which is problematic and can be only potentially valid, in the case of Kant, a homogeneity in categories or in action, in the case of Hegel). Such ontology (which starts with Parmenides) disregards the essential and co-genetic heterogeneity of being—which results, as to its character, in temporality and creativity. The concomitant gnosiology also overlooks the basic character of human thought (and cognition) as imaginary creation—which, is certainly subject to restrictive conditions—on one hand external (with reference to any object) on the other hand internal (cohesion and consequentiality, historicity). For the same reasons, what

is later said on the complementarity of Kantianism (criticism) and Hegelianism (universalism)—although they reach beyond what one could expect within the frame of inherited knowledge—do not coincide with the ideas I began articulating after 1965. Furthermore, the text is redolent of the very strong influence of the idea of the complete axiomatisation and mathematisation of knowledge, which, in the best of cases, has only a restricted (“typical”) value. For all these matters the reader will find my later ideas in the texts, “Modern Science and the Philosophical Quest”, “The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy” and “The Ontological Significance of the History of Science”.

The theory of the social sciences will always have anchored its objective foundation in the ineluctable theoretical justification of every scientific activity through its reduction to the whole; yet it is not less true that the underlying subjective motive which informs it is the incontestable *crisis* of the social sciences, which can no longer be called either an infantile or an adolescent malady since it has acquired the character of permanence. The analytic research into such relevant phenomena would carry us very far. However, it would be impossible not to mention in brief its central symptoms and basic causes.

No more can be said here than has been said earlier about the need for a theory of science, which springs from the necessity for the production of scientific principles. Here we will speak only about the character of self-awareness that the theory of science possesses.

Science means consciousness, that is: theory. By equal necessity, it also means the lack of self-awareness—what scientific consciousness appropriates as cognition is not its own self. What is known through science is completely different from what is to be known, by the fact of knowing itself. Now, in order to have self-awareness, the materialisation of forms is indispensable. Every such materialisation defines and justifies a corresponding distinction of activities: in this case the distinction between science and theory of science.

There have hitherto been frequent discussions about the *crisis* of social or other kinds of science, and they continue unabated, in most instances with purely philological or opportunistic goals. Here we try to define the concept and the content of such a crisis through the analysis of its symptoms. (By crisis I understand the manifestation of such symptoms).

The most appropriate way to study the current crisis is not through the theory of science but through the sciences of history and of the sociology of knowledge, as well as of applied logic (look for the concept in Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Kirchmann, 1877, pp. 1010–102), although it must inevitably be supported by a theory of science, as applies to every specialised research.

The conclusions of history and of sociology of knowledge should not contradict conclusions of the theory of knowledge because even in this case the demand for the exclusion of contradictions from the internal structure of the cognitive system. The usual Neo-Kantian answer, which is based on the distinction between *factum* and *jus*, and consequently on the unrelatedness of the two cognitive fields, does not solve the problem; we are interested (though not exclusively) in ideal knowledge but in its historical knowledge and its possibilities. The fact that such possibilities are real and, in many of their aspects realisable, is a truth which cannot be free from any uncontradictory doubt, and must always be emphasised in the face of every form of scepticism and relativism. Therefore, next to the pure theory of knowledge (that is: how a cognitive system is constructed and how it gains its status) and next to the theory of real knowledge (that is: how the concrete cognitive activity of a real subject is shaped) there is also a need for an historical (as I call it) theory of knowledge, that is: how the concrete cognitive activity of a real subject is related to a cognitive system and acquires status (as I define it). Such an intermediary part between the pure theory of knowledge and the theory of actual knowledge also has as its mission the creation of an agreement between their conclusions; and this cannot happen except by using the (axiomatic) definition of history as *geltendes Sein* or *seiendes Gelten*. In regard to these questions, see what is later said about the possible concepts of the subject.

1988. The question of the relationship between a “pure” theory of knowledge and an “historical” theory never ceased preoccupying me. This is, in other words, the question of the rational-transcendental (transzendental) and of the historic-pragmatic dimensions of knowledge, which is only posited in the text but not resolved there. I will discuss it again extensively in studies which will soon be published (and especially in the volumes of the Human Creation). The reader will find enough material in the texts referred to in the previous note. In any case, the definition of history as “geltendes Sein” or “seiendes Gelten”—of the being that dominates or of the “domination” that is—is not accepted at all by me today.

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1988. The demands pertaining to scientific methodology expressed in these pages obviously echo a “logical-mathematical” orientation and are aptly discussed earlier in the observations included in the footnotes to page 19. I will add only that the immense development, strictness and fertility of mathematics are inextricably bound to the character of their subject-matter not (simply) as “purely mental” but also as determined by the ensemblist-identitary logic. The same also holds

for their astonishing applicability to the “natural world” which certainly encompasses a limitless dimension (an infinity of dimensions) determined in an ensemblistic and identitary manner. Such a dimension, of course, also necessarily exists in the socio-historical world, where it is, however, in an equally necessary sense, indissolubly bound to the purely imaginary dimension, a fact that excludes any “mathematical” approach. Consequently, even in the most “favourable” instance, mathematisation never went beyond the level of exercises in elementary algebra and analysis, totally irrelevant to the reality of economy.

The first basic symptom is the non-existence of a system of categories. In natural science, for example, the undermining of the category of causality created an endless disturbance and forced physicists to clarify this subject, before proceeding further. In the social sciences, the category of causality not only becomes the object of a constant tug of war, but the whole system of basic concepts also changes from researcher to researcher.

The system of categories is the basis of a specific branch of science. The system of categories is the system of the principles underlying the potentiality and the truthfulness of the axioms. Category is one moment of judgment; it appears within science itself—long before the theory of science; the theory of science, on the one hand, simply recognises it and, on the other, creates it (insofar as it justifies it through its reduction to a transcendental principle). Thus, the system of categories, unfounded but real, must have existed within science long before the invention of the theory of science. (An example of this is the physics of the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as the Kantian theory of knowledge).

Without needing any further explanation to the most obvious event that a system of categories does not exist within social sciences, it must be stressed that there is no exact or clear *concept* of category either. Thus L.V. Wiese lists as “basic” sociological categories the following: social process, distance, social space, social formation (*sozialer Prozess, Abstand, sozialer Raum, soziales Gebilde*), and falls into a twofold error: 1) he imagines and presents as categories certain simple empirical concepts of genus; 2) by moving from one concept to another, through their categorisation he changes the basis of their division.

The second basic symptom is the non-existence of a systematic articulation—not only within a each science taken separately, but also within the totality of social sciences. Virtually none of the social sciences exhibits the strict internal construction that constitutes the concept of science; and none evaluates methodically the exigencies of the fact that it is only one of the social sciences and that its subject-matter is only one artificially abstracted aspect of the unified social becoming.

The unity of the social world is not ideational but real; this unity is not created by the identity of laws but by the internal unity of the subject, by the “uniformity of material” (on the legitimation of the last group of concepts see the section referring to the categories of the mental and the social world). The social is constituted by its pragmatic reference to the *co-* of acting. The multiplicity of its sciences is established on the multiplicity of the possible perspectives (methods) of theorising on the uniform social reality. The demand for an internal construction projected onto these sciences is self-evident, as is the obvious fact that such a demand remains largely unfulfilled.

Such internal systematic construction in its ideational form is axiomatisation: (I define) the production of the propositions of science from the axioms *and* of the axioms from the categories. I will not elaborate here upon the world-making coherence which results from the previous definition, how that is the condensation of empiricism is evaluated by the categories or (similarly) by reducing every quality of the empirical to the content of the category itself—simply put of the (cognitive) production of the empirical from the logical, and of the world from the categories. It suffices to observe here that this is the decisive point from which the internal coherence of Kantianism leads to Hegelianism; Kantianism remains incomplete without Hegelianism and Hegelianism without Kantianism remains unfounded. And in the philosophy of the spirit, as in every other philosophy, criticism and (as I name it) totalism are two necessary, mutually validated moments in the march of reason.

At the same time, however, with such internal building creation another demand emerges within this field: to recreate within science the already fragmented unity of the social world, through the institution of a system of social sciences; incorporation in the system of social sciences means for every specific science of the social its need to be linked with all other sciences through the reconstitution of the totality (the unified totality) of their subject matter.

The third basic symptom is the absence of a unified external scientific methodology. Entering scientific space means primarily submission to scientific method (in its most external sense); and method here means the strict discipline of the researcher, the self-limitation which is manifest in the negotiation of only certain notions which can be defined directly and of certain questions whose position has a precisely determined meaning.

External characteristics of scientific research are:

- a) Using exclusively notions which are strictly determined; abstaining from using notions which cannot be defined unambiguously. Science should not have to deal with problems that emanate from the probably indeterminate characters of such notions because its very notions are not primary. This question belongs exclusively to philosophy.

- b) Avoidance of breaking down the coherence of the mode of thought of the specific science, except in cases of necessity or of obvious utility—but even then with an immediate proof of the need or the usefulness. Thus, for example avoiding any purposeless change of notions or of their content.
- c) Unambiguous articulation of questions.
- d) Research into the possibilities of the question (the possibility of the unambiguous definition of the meaning for at least one solution for it).
- e) Rigorous process of proof. The articulation of the stimuli giving rise to the question of course cannot be excluded as a principle. This becomes on many occasions a very aid to or consummation of the work done by others. At the same time, the law must always be strictly distinguished from its hypothesis: what has been proven with precision (according to the demands of scientific argumentation) from what is still simply a hypothesis, despite its likely immense heuristic or any other value.

The most cursory reviewing of the contemporary situation of the social sciences suffices to yield the conclusions that:

- a) Almost nowhere is there any attempt made to employ strictly defined notions (with the most prominent exception, Max Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*).
- b) Nowhere is any attempt made to continue to discuss systematically—even in a negative way—the past and the present of science. No self-respecting theorist of sciences uses a whole system of notions specific only to himself, or according to his own particular definition of them (explicitly or—even worse—tacitly). Moreover, no one does this without advancing convincing arguments for the inevitability of these notions or without proving the uselessness of the old ones.
- c) Putting all other things aside, let it be stressed how parochial the demonstrative element in social sciences is. If we overlook certain propositions whose validity relies on their tautological character, very rarely can we find what is called a rigorous scientific demonstration within the social sciences. In most instances, we are speaking of probabilities or demonstrations of the (simple) possibility of what has to be proved because it is necessary.

The usual objection that in the field of social sciences there is no possibility of demonstration—that is to say that ultimately there can be no social science—

will be refuted with the research that follows, which wants to prove precisely the possibility of social science and its rules.

The fourth and most serious symptom is the absence of any compelling quality in the conclusions of the social sciences. This symptom is, of course, the simple consequence of the previous three. The logical stability of mathematics or physics has a pragmatic correlation, a social representative and guarantor based on the actual agreement of scientists, which could be used even as an external proof for the passage of a theory from hypothesis to the order of a scientific rule. In the realm of social sciences the absence of such agreement led to the formulation of theories which question even the objective possibility of a unified and correct social science.

No one is so naive as to imagine that complete agreement prevails in physics or mathematics at any given moment between all researchers as to the totality of their questions. However, the variety of opinions is restricted to a few specific points and lasts for a limited period of time. In the social sciences, such variations encompass all questions and has no end. For examples of sceptical views on the unity of social sciences see K. Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, 1930 passim and A. Vierkandt's article "Wissenssoziologie", *Handbuch der Soziologie*, 1931.

The question must be posed in more general terms, for in its root lies the relationship between objectivity and historicity. This cannot be discussed here, not even with regard to its reference to the cognitive field. Some hints about this will be given further down.

On one hand, the causes of this phenomenon emerge as concomitants of what the social sciences have hitherto been; thus we must consider the absence of the possibility of experiments and the lack of mathematical tools. On the other, they are related to the objectivity of the social sciences and the immediate holistic extra-scientific relationship of the observer. Both the conscious and the mainly subconscious influence on the scientist in his social positions (both class and political) in this aspect is decisive.

We cannot discuss here the question of experimentation in the social sciences; on the issue of observation, see the excerpt from Max Weber which is published further down and the comments, especially in numbers 14 and 21.

Regarding mathematics: the progress and recognition of mathematics are due a) to the employment of rigorous external scientific methods b) to the rapid (for this science) realisation of the hypothetical character of its principles c) to its unrelatedness to empirical material and to its character as a science of the pure mind d) to the use of symbols and of symbolic logic, which strengthens and universalises the content of such mental activities. All these characteristics

(with the exception of the third) could also be applied to the social sciences, just as they were ultimately the central characteristics of physics.

Using mathematics in the social sciences: the common view that mathematics cannot be used in the realm of the social sciences, because the social is constructed qualitatively in its essence while mathematics deals with quantities, does not merit discussion.

Irrespective of where it *began*, mathematics as a science does not have a closer relationship to quantity than to any other category; mathematics is a way of thinking which deduces from specific relations between symbols other relations which were previously unknown. The rapid application of mathematics in the natural sciences was due to the fact that the possibility of using the same symbols was quite obvious; the relation of symbol 3 and 5 for example which is symbolised with x , could be used as a model for the relation between the moving time of anything that moves in regard to the unit of time, as these two “entities” could be depicted with the same symbols (by using the appropriate measuring scales): that is, we could symbolise natural “entities” by using symbols which we already use in mathematics. Consequently, I can infer the relation between these entities by referring to the relation between these symbols; in order not to contradict myself, it suffices to define each time my symbols unambiguously (for instance by using, as in the previous example, the same measuring scale). In this specific example, the possibility of correlating symbols derives from the possibility of measuring natural objects. Clearly, this is not the only possible basis for correlation, as is obvious from the meaning of the number itself which does not have a quantitative content, but generally speaking a content of *relationship*. The specific principles for the possibility of correlating social “entities” and mathematical symbols will be explored by the relevant science which has yet to be created. Regarding symbolic logic, as it began to be crystallised out from mathematics, see Hilbert-Ackermann, *Grundzuge der theoretischen Logik*, 1938.



I shall now make a persistent attempt to ensure that the elaboration of the manner in which problems should be posited and answered be conducted in a *critical* manner.

This is the most basic meaning of a critical philosophical approach. It is at once what distinguishes it, as against any idealistic or materialistic dogmatism: before positing the problem, we must elaborate on the possibility of the problem itself. While dogmatism posits problems and gives answers, remaining indifferent to their legitimacy and possibility, a critical approach tries to

find and clarify the conditions under which and only under them this problem has meaning for us.

Even scepticism is dogmatism, in the sense that scepticism does not acknowledge that the possibility of any cognitive problem presupposes the possibility of cognition, and that consequently the solution which it gives to the problem contradicts the conditions for the possibility of the problem. Therefore the answer: "anything that exists solely within the presupposition of the thinking subject" which indeed can infuriate the common man, is simply an innocent tautology: whatever exists for science exists under the presuppositions of science itself. Otherwise: since existence is a category, that is: a category of the mind, the mind itself is presupposed, so that such a category could be attributed to anything. However, is it possible for anything to exist "without reference to cognition"? This is an entirely meaningless problem; a model of what one should never ask. There are no questions "without reference to cognition", unless one adopts the perspective of the mystic (whether an idealistic or materialistic mystic is irrelevant from this perspective). The problem is a cognitive phenomenon. For its understanding, an analysis of the concept "existence" will suffice: this cannot have a scientific, cognitive or logical meaning unless it refers to the existence appropriate to science, cognition and logic. Certainly, science is here not merely the experimental occupation followed, e.g. by means of various equations, but any proposition which claims to be true. Any discussion about the existence of things outside and independently of any cognition presupposes a completely unscientific and non-logical (thus: mystical) way of encountering things, which cannot be discussed here. This statement is necessary in order to pre-empt any misunderstanding of the true meaning of the problems we are next to posit.

In the field of philosophy, the first immediate consequence of the way we see questions is the initial recognition of the legitimacy of cognitive problems within the theory of knowledge. The only point of departure for philosophical knowledge is the fact of knowing. All metaphysical problems, especially "existential problems" raised by the old philosophy, are rejected as spurious by critical philosophy. For critical philosophy the question: "how does something exist and how does it not happen that nothing exists?" has and can have only the following meaning: "that something exists for science and for knowledge."

Knowledge is the inevitable starting point for philosophy, since it is the only *factum*; every questioning of this moves within the cognitive field, and thus it is forced to build with one hand what it wants to demolish with the other. The question of *evaluating* knowledge from the perspective that resists becoming part of the cognitive field, or of its complete rejection, is of course totally different. Such approaches are not refuted by the previous syllogism.

Look for example in Sarantaris' *The Presence of Man* and Kazantzakis' *Odyssey* and K. Despotopoulos critique, as it is transposed into another way of being (for the first, journal *Propylaia*, pp. 115–127 and the second *New Hestia*, t 12., pp. 286–287).

1988. "Transposed into another way of being": in the critique previously referred to, the much loved Konstantinos Despotopoulos misunderstood, chronically I think, that Sarantaris described human approaches in an authentic way and Kazantzakis in a Kazantzakian way that never made a claim to logicity or could be refuted by employing logical, or even philosophical criteria.

The *critical analysis* of cognitive phenomena begins with the attempt to define the simplest, logically first, non-reducible elements constituting knowledge. It is obvious that this stage of research is of purely abstract character, since, by definition, no simple elements exist within the actual complex of knowledge.

Kant was completely conscious of the abstract character of critical analysis (*Kritik d. r. V*, p. 73, §1); Hegel also considers simple concepts as abstracted isolation (*Logik*, Bd. I. Jubil. Ausg. 1936, pp. 102–104) See also the first part of Lask's dissertation *Fichte's Idealismus und die Geschichte*, in *Ges. Schriften* Bd. i., 1923).

The question of the logical foundations of such first principles for research of this kind does not have the same meaning, nor can it have the same solution as the question of founding any specific scientific proposition. This last point indicates the need for identifying propositions which could ground the proposition we intend to construct. This process of grounding necessarily ends with certain propositions which cannot be referred to any further grounding of the same kind. Their truth is guaranteed by the fact that only they can construct the complete edifice and it constitutes the only possible guarantee for them. From this point of view they can be characterised as "axioms".

For the grounding of the principles accepted before, see: Natorp, *Vorl. über Praktische Philosophie*, 1925, p. 30; *Logische Grundlagen d. Exakten Wissenschaften*, 1910, p. 16–26.

These axioms could be also called *hypotheses*. Then even the ultimate axiom, which could support the whole cognitive system, would be a final hypothesis; such a hypothesis is nevertheless not a real hypothesis but essentially a categorical proposition, which cannot be questioned, of the following kind: knowledge is a, b, c, . . . in which an affirmation about the reality of knowing (an affirmation beyond doubting) and a definition of knowledge is included.

I am compelled to believe that I myself, with all the contents of my consciousness, do not exhaust the world. This means: I have to hypothesise (neces-

sarily) that in anything I feel or think there is a “basis”, a “substratum”, a “core”, an “essence”, which transcends this specific act of conceiving even my own consciousness in general.

I can classify such acts of conception in two categories: those manifested as (sensory) perceptions and those manifested as thoughts. The contents of the first I call “sensible”, of the second “noetic”.

Such sensible or noetic phenomena (let us inaccurately say: the phenomenality and the logicity) is obvious that they do not express “absolute” qualities of X but only partial qualities emerging in connection to the presence of a subjective act of conception; both phenomenality and logicity are creations of such encounter.

The first error I avoid here is the confusion between what is sensible and what I called X, that is the attribution to X of any phenomenality, independent of any act of conception. In its simplest form, this error is called naive realism; it corresponds to imagining that X “exists”, “independent” of the act of its conception, green or red, light or heavy, solid or liquid, rectangular or round: forgetting that the act of conception constitutes an indissoluble synthesis in which I will never be able to distinguish “what belongs to X”, since whatever I disassociate will in its turn be another content of another act of conception, and therefore something very complex. Therefore, I cannot attribute any sensible qualities to X.

A second, equivalent and homologous error would be to confound what is noetic with X, to attribute logicity or noeticity to X, independent of the needs of my own act of noetic conception. This could be called naive idealism. In this case, I would forget that the “X” and the “independent of” the act of conception “is” not “one” or “many” or “all” or “exists” or “does not exist” etc., and that ultimately, again in any “noetic” act of mine, what comes out of myself and what comes out of X cannot be ultimately differentiated.

A direct consequence of these thoughts is the abandoning of such an understanding of “real object” or of “objective reality”, of “X”, not only as useless but also as a contradictory idea; any affirmation regarding X, attributing to it any sensible or noetic, qualities (even for example the quality of “limit” or the “incomprehensible”) would fall into either of errors I indicated earlier.

1988. The question of the “real object” is not exhausted by what is said in this essay. The “X” of the “object” ultimately remains always “X”; however what I think about the object bears some “relation” with “X” (which in the final analysis remains beyond any description). See my “Ontological Import of the History of Science”.

Definitions

Sensible World

I define everything that is given to me by my senses, both external and internal, as *sensible*; its ability to be able to be given to me through the senses as *sensibility*; its specific given sensible object as *phenomenon*; and the symbolised presence of a phenomenon, through a correct judgement as, *existence*.

I define *sensibility* as the criterion for the subject matter of the natural sciences. Whatever is the subject-matter of the natural sciences must be also sensible and whatever is sensible can be the subject matter of a natural science.

The Greek language does not distinguish between *Objekt* and *Gegenstand*; see, Rickert, *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, 1921, pp. 100–1001, *Objekt* means the subject-matter in the sense of *purpose*, of *the ideal measure* of knowledge. Here the word object is used in the first sense.

We should talk about the natural science and not about natural sciences; the science of the natural world can and should be one. See also, Heisenberg, “Die Einheit des Naturwissenschaftlichen Weltbildes”. In *Wandlungen in den Grundlagen der Naturwissenschaft*, p. 77 passim, 1943. I speak here about natural sciences, in order to avoid any limitation of natural science in its most narrow sense, in contrast to chemistry, biological sciences, and empirical psychology.

I define all phenomena given to me by external sensations as material phenomena and the phenomena which are given by my internal sense as psychical phenomena.

Materiality here means no more than what is said in its definition: the ability to be given through external senses. But not with reference to any essence, as for example matter, research into which constitutes a purely scientific problem, as the necessary hypothesis for the explanation of the sensory impressions themselves. Contemporary perception of matter has nothing to do with its usual appearance in everyday life, which has constituted the basis of all materialistic philosophical systems so far, as a simple reference to the general theory of relativity would indicate; there matter is denuded of gravity, something that until recently was thought to be its determining faculty, and is transformed into a quality of space, both in the theories of de Broglie (where matter is a band of waves) and Schrödinger (in which matter is theorised as a ripple of sub-ether).

Anger, sadness or a certain volitional impulse are all sensible, as is colour or sound—irrespective if they are not given by the same—“external”—senses. See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, (v. Kirmann, 1877) p. 83 (§6) passim., p. 323 (“Von den Paralogismen der reinen Vernunft”). However they are never *only* sensible—but more about this shortly.

As in the case of materiality, *psychicality* means nothing but what is said in its definition: the possibility of bringing out, through external senses and with no connection to any essence, the psyche itself, with its various faculties, which constitutes the basis of all relevant phenomena. About the necessity and the problematic character of such concept (idea) of psyche for empirical psychology, see Kant, *Kr. d. r. Ver. P.* 323, "Von den Paralogismen der reinen Vernunft", Prolegomena, p. 90 (§46) *passim*.

I define the total sum of *sensible* things as the *sensible world* and the total sum of all *existing* things as the natural world (material and psychical).

I define as the *objectivity* of a phenomenon its ability to be sensed by a given subject. From these definitions it becomes obvious that 'the sensible' is not intended here with the meaning usually attributed to it by scepticism; see Plato, *Theatetus*. On the other hand of course, the objectivity of what is sensible (and only that) does not have the meaning attributed to it by naive realism; it is not supported by "objective" (in the sense of extra-subjective) qualities of "things". This is a totally meaningless and contradictory concept, since every sensible quality presupposes the intervention of the senses—and it is what it is specifically only for the presupposition of the relevant sense and its appropriate specific construction. Therefore, objectivity about what is sensible can only have the meaning of pan-subjectivity. For this reason, distinguishing what is normal from what is pathological in the construction of senses is simply of statistical character and bears no correspondence to the concepts of right and wrong. See Democritus, in Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

I define the elements which determine the transition from the sensible to the natural world as laws of the natural world. These are space, time and the laws of natural causality.

The natural world is the world of existing things, that is, of the phenomena which appear in scientific judgements. By becoming part of such judgement, everything sensible necessarily results to its reduction to laws. See below for the true character of such laws.

Intelligible World

I define as *intelligible* everything insofar as it is given to my thought; its ability to be given to my thought as *intelligibility*; the specific given intelligible as *meaning* and the possibility of the presence of a meaning within a true judgement as *power*.

Sensible things are not the only objects we can encounter. Apart from them we also encounter intelligible object-meanings.

The fact that the world of meanings is completely different from the sensible world of external phenomena, of the natural world requires little discussion.

The concept of the circle in Euclid's geometry, for example, has no equivalent in the real world, however it may have been generated as a geometric concept—not only because real space is not Euclidian, but (as already noted by Plato in his *Seventh Epistle*, 343a) because it is impossible for a real circle for example, either wooden or drawn, not to touch upon more than one successive points of a real line.

It appears more difficult to distinguish the meaning from the internal phenomenon that accompanies it, and the psychical energy of the specific subject that experiences it; but to identify meaning with psychical energy for this reason would be equal to identifying sound and chord. This question can be easily resolved through the study of its own formulation: when many people think about the same thing (see: K. Tsatsos, *The Question of Legal Hermeneutics*, 1932, p. 21, Lask, *Die Lehre vom Urteil*, in *Ges, Schri.* II, p. 292, Husserl, *Log. Untersuchungen*, Bd. I, passim), for example that $a = a$, their psychical energies, as real (specific) energies, pertain to the specific individuals, and are distinct from each other, yet they have, beyond anything else, something in common: that they all refer to $a = a$; and, furthermore, they do so in a uniform way: the uniformity of such reference makes possible the construction of whole systems of intercommunication and coexistence. Consequently, I call this common content, the intention, the reference, the intensity of psychical energy, as the *meaning of psychical energy*.

The distinction between concrete and abstract can be useful in assisting the comprehension of this difference: all sensible things, psychical and natural, can become the content of a certain *perceptio* only as something specific; no experience, psychical or natural, gives me *actuellment the dog in general* or *the anger in general*, but it always gives me the specific dog or anger. I do not sense the dog in general or the anger in general but I think of it. On the contrary, for everything concrete, I always need the reference to the specificity (*tode ti*) of the senses.

Meanings do not exist (since the concept itself has a pure content, not accessible to what is sensible); in order to express the fact that they are given to us, that in a certain way, which is not literal, they “are”, we use the empowerment of judging.

I define *intelligibility* as the criterion for the subject matter of all noetic sciences. Whatever is the subject matter of spiritual sciences must be intelligible and what is intelligible must be the subject matter of noetic sciences.

I define the total sum of everything intelligible as the intelligible world and the total sum of empowering judgements as the rational world.

The rational world includes only correct meanings; for an exposition of the whole issue, see below.

I define as the objectivity of meaning the correctness of meaning, irrespective of any concrete subjective act of recognition, but not of subjectivity in general.

Regarding the character of objectivity [we need]: a) independence of any specific subjective approach towards meaning; meaning never ceases being correct or wrong even if it is considered by all either correct or wrong; b) since objectivity is defined as correctness, it takes on a certain subjective character, which also determines the possibility of the opposite characterisation as correct or wrong. On this central issue for all researches into the intelligible world, see. Lask, *Die Lehre vom Urteil*, *passim*, and see below.

I define the elements which determine the transition from the intelligible to the rational world as laws of the rational world.

Sensibility is not the only, basic attribute of the phenomenal world. Much more important for the construction of this world are the rational frameworks in which this world is situated. The sensible world is determined by the fact that its constituent elements are necessarily in relations with each other that we call relations of space, others that we call relations of time, and finally in other relations that we may call relations of natural determinism, indicating a certain dependence whose character is either necessary or probable (since we cannot enter into a discussion about the character of the law of causality in modern physics). See below for the categorical character of the constitutive natural laws.

1988. What is implicit in and yet missing from this text is the recognition of the social-historical world as a world of imaginary significations. See in The Imaginary Institution of Society, Chapter Tree (1965) and the whole second part (1975).

The non-sensibility again (the non-reality) of the intelligible world is expressed by the fact of its freedom from those relations that determine sensible things. What is intelligible is not only what is not sensible; above anything else, it is outside space, time and the other relations between things. This requires an explanation.

1. The fact that everything intelligible is not determined by spatial relations does not a separate discussion. Even empirical psychology (which does not deal with meanings in the sense that we use the term here, but only with their psychical substrate, their psychical energy) admits that it is meaningless to talk about spatial relations with reference to psychical phenomena and that we may speak meaningfully of only temporal relations.

2. Are these temporal relations which determine psychical phenomena perhaps determinants of their content and of its meanings?

The non-temporality of intelligible things has a twofold sense:

- a) From the definition itself we understand that everything intelligible has the possibility of identity, irrespective of the psychical energy that contains it, an energy that is purely concrete and purely temporal. I know the identity of meaning of $a = a$ in Aristotle, Kant and in contemporary philosophy. This eternity of the intelligible, if analysed correctly, means: the possibility of becoming manifest at all times. It does not mean continuous presence, as in the probable eternity of a natural phenomenon, but only the continuous possibility of presence. An historical period may have passed in which, for example, the meanings of *Theatetus*, had no real presence; however there was the possibility for them to become manifest, let us say: through the contact with a real subject. This enduring potentiality is one of the aspects of the atemporal essence of intelligibility (which would have been intra-temporal if it was actualised in every time.
- b) The time of existing natural phenomena is not a uniform framework with a simple qualitative character. It has an internal dynamism, a heterogeneity which the philosophers associate with the second law of thermodynamics. All these mean that time is the inescapable frame of becoming. All sensible things are subject to such becoming. See Heraclitus, Fr 18, 19, Diels, Plato, *Cratylus* 502 a–c; Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, *passim*. On psychical time see, Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, *passim*, especially: *Le Temps retrouvé*.

1988. For reasons mentioned in the previous notes, the discussion of the “atemporality” (meaning: non-historicity) of meaning is inadequate as it is conducted in this text. Here also the absence of the idea of imaginary significations hinders the satisfactory exploration of the relation between what is “intelligible” and actual historical subjects.

Careful observation reveals that intelligible things do not partake of this becoming; the evolution of perceptions, of knowledge and of theories does not mean an evolution in meaning. It simply indicates an expansion or limitation or alteration of real subjects' participation in the system of objective meaning. Two points need clarification here:

- I. Meanings are not created by the actions of the subject which expresses them; cultural advancement, for example, does not mean the creation of rational meanings, but rather an increase in the participation in them by historical subjects. This becomes quite obvious if we think of the opposite: the decline of a culture, for example, does not mean the destruction of its system of meanings, but simply the removal of their historical presence. Let us take as an example, the historical schema: Antiquity—Middle Ages—Renaissance. Archimedes' notions never ceased to exist during the Middle Ages and were re-invented in the modern era. And yet we believe that, if an historical proof were given that no one had ever thought of them during this period, we could have made someone accept them during the same period. Consequently they *did* exist then, but without an historical and empirical presence—they existed in the sense that they were valid, they continued defining the relations between real phenomena, and thus they were real. Therefore there is no reason to concede that they began existing, began being valid from the moment Archimedes formulated them, and that only then did they become true.
- II. It seems incontestable that every meaning, even the most accurate mathematical or commonplace rational notion, acquires an absolute individual character through the psychical energy of a subject. Thus it takes on a unique character. A simple reference to each different psychical environment will suffice to show that we do not think of $2+2 = 4$ in precisely the *same way* as others do. A similar reference may be made to the constellation of other rational contents of psychical energy and to the emotions that affect the whole complex. This is the way in which meaning becomes visible—to whatever degree of rational clarity as an individual event, and to the degree that is also dependent on time. The difficulty is only apparent: since we have defined meaning as precisely all those elements that are amenable to *uniform intelligibility*, irrespective of their number. The presence of such elements can also be demonstrated by actual communication and coexistence between human beings.
- III. The issue of the validity of laws of natural connection with regard to intelligible things has given rise to serious doubts. The whole issue will later be discussed in detail. Let us here point out only the following:
 - a) that every natural connection (for example: causality) presupposes the temporal relation between what is connected, something that does not appear in anything intelligible.

- b) that the validity of everything intelligible is based on criteria which do not refer to any natural connection (for example: causality), criteria which are exclusively rational. Even the most erroneous judgement, as well as the most significant, must be justified causally, since these refer to actual events. We cannot distinguish the correct meaning of the latter, as against the *non-correct* meaning of the former, by using only the principles of natural connection; we need other criteria for this purpose: the accord between the laws of connecting meaning with correctness that is with rational laws. However, more about these at a later point.²

² Translators' Note: Castoriadis further elaborates some of the ideas expressed here in his long comments on Max Weber's *Economy and Society*, which we don't include in the translation.

Obituary for A[gis] Stinas

Cornelius Castoriadis

Translated by Vrasidas Karalis and Anthony Stephens

With the death of Stinas¹ not only a hero was lost to us, but also a human type that contemporary society does not seem able to create or even tolerate any more. When I started thinking about what I would be saying today, the Homeric verse came into my mind “*it’s a man whom not even praise does not befit him by evil people*” which I would prefer to see changed into “*it’s a man whom not even praise does not befit him by us the evil people.*” Calling him a saint would be insulting. Whatever a saint does is with the unshakeable illusion that sometime and somewhere there will be a reward. However in the incredibly tormented life of Spyros, (decades in Akronauplia, Egina,² islands, police stations, criminal wards in Soteria Hospital, as he suffered from tuberculosis all his life), a life, during which this man never tasted, when he was out of prison, warm food, nor ever experienced the affection of either a wife or a child, a life in which he didn’t find any support or any consolation in some otherworldly promise. The only hope that sustained him was that one day humanity could be emancipated and free. Despite the hopelessness with which he responded to the contemporary situation, in the last years of his life he anxiously tried to decipher, in such a chaotic reality, the most miniscule signs that could indicate that the movement for freedom and justice, the genuine revolutionary movement would remain alive for ever.

For many years during all our meetings (probably since 1980) our discussions moved between these two poles. On the one hand, there are hopeful signs that could be seen on the international political stage, i.e., the Polish movement of *Solidarity*, the establishment of the working-class state of Lula in Brazil around 1983 and the rallies that followed. His attention was always turned towards movements of all peoples, because for Spyros internationalism

* It was read in March 1989 at the political memorial for A. Stinas, at the Law School in Athens, and published in the *Flowers of Evil*, issue no 4. Translated here from the Greek edition, *The Fragmented World*, Ypsilon Books, 1992, pp. 143–150. See also ‘Translators’ Note’.

1 Stinas first appears as Agis, Alexandros and Spyros. His real name was Spyros Priftis.

2 Akronauplia and Egina were notorious prisons in which the dictatorship of General Metaxas (1936–1941) kept all left-wing convicts.

was not an ideology but his very nature. On the same credit side of his ledger he added the visits he constantly received from young people (I don't know how they discovered him), individuals, anonymous groups or even organisations, that suddenly and without invitation went to see him, in order to express their agreement, or to draw from him ideas and experience. Unpredicted and unexpected visits that pleased him immensely. When he talked about them—saying “young people from Kaisariani, from Kokkinia³ came to see me” or “some group wanted to abandon the party”—anyone could immediately witness how his face and his voice became passionate again. On the debit side of his ledger, more and more despair and abhorrence was added against the ways of contemporary humanity, at least in the so-called developed countries: apathy, privatisation, cynicism, egotism, the dissolution of ideas and practices, individual and collective imbecility with television, football and the rest.

He constantly returned to the most pressing question, for those who believe always in freedom and justice, “How did we end up with this?” When we met, he used to ask me this persistently, as if I would be able to answer. Or as if anyone could give an explanation—(in the same way we might explain an eclipse of the moon or a bushfire) within such a chaotic total sum of trends and phenomena that make up contemporary humanity's path towards debilitation through consumerism, the commodification of everything, the most vulgar manipulation of the presumed public opinion, the cynical domination of economic and political bureaucracy and oligarchy.

What I would like to emphasise is the persistence with which Spyros returned over and over to the question of the *primal*, if I may so call it, derailment of the working class and revolutionary movement. And on this question I would like to raise two issues; one, I would say, more historical and the other, maybe, somehow more philosophical.

The historical issue relates directly to the development of Spyros' ideas, which, from quite early on, was parallel to mine from the moment we met, with the exception of a brief interlude I will talk about. I won't return to this, but I will state that from the beginning Spyros greeted enthusiastically all the work done in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Also, when I was able to return to Greece in November 1954, I discovered our complete agreement on all primary and secondary questions. Some time someone should write in detail and analyse this development, about which Spyros himself offers some evidence in his book *Recollections*. Here I would like to point out certain crucial points. As John Tamtakos reminded us, quite early on when the Third International

3 Kokkinia and Kaisariani are working class suburbs in Athens, places of many historical uprisings during the twentieth century.

entered that criminal stage, anyway one of its criminal stages, since they were all criminal, which was called third period, Spyros “cut off” from the Greek Communist Party, which simply expelled him. Then he proceeded with a radical critique of Stalinism and immediately reached the conclusion that any reform or re-invention of all communist parties and of the Third International was impossible. In an article by him, in 1932 or 1933, if I remember correctly, he supported the need to establish a new International and declared the death of the Third International (from a revolutionary point of view), whereas at the same time Trotsky himself believed that the struggle with the International was still possible.

In that period Trotsky still believed in the International, and, as we all know, only after the German catastrophe in 1933 did he accept the idea that Communist parties and the International were unable to accept any reform and the need for a new revolutionary organisation was imperative.

Immediately after, and especially in Akronafplia,⁴ maybe in 1937 or 1938, (written records exist but are withheld, illegally of course, by his former Trotskyite comrades), Spyros in his discussions with official Trotskyites and with the austere political and social logic and timeliness so characteristic of him, had reached the conclusion that Trotsky’s slogan about “the unconditional support of the working class state”, that is: of the so-called USSR, was unacceptable in the event of war. . . . This question, the notorious Russian Question, that is: the social character of the Russian regime, persistently pre-occupied Spyros.

It was at that time, at the end of 1942 or the beginning of 1943, when through a beloved and now deceased friend of mine, I met Spyros for the first time. I was immediately impressed, as probably never again in my entire life, by the sharpness, boldness and uncompromising character of his political thought and joined the organisation he inspired together with Demosthenes Voursoukes, John Tamtakos and other comrades. That was the period of the German occupation and the so-called Resistance. Since the very beginning, Spyros had defined the correct internationalist line against the Trotskyite policy that supported the so-called national-liberation struggle. I still remember how we attempted, indeed how successful we were, in distributing pamphlets written in German by throwing them into the military barracks around Attica. The critically flawed point in our analysis during the occupation was our assessment of the *National Liberation Movement* (EAM), of the Greek Communist Party and their strength. The residue of the Trotskyite illusion, that weighed heavily on us

4 Akronafplia was a notorious prison in the city of Nafplion, Peloponese, whose inmates were mostly communists of different factions.

and that we hadn't yet thrown off ourselves, was the idea that Stalinist parties had joined the bourgeoisie, in the same manner as had happened forty or fifty years earlier with reformist social-democracy.

But the hour of truth came in December 1944. What kind of bourgeois or reformist party was this, which tried to take over power by force, exterminating everything and everyone—forgetting for a moment its dark and not entirely unknown history of indecision or the stupid manner in which its Stalinist management, from its own perspective, fought the battle of Athens? And what motivated or incited the masses that followed them? At this one juncture, the only disagreement I had in my entire life with Spyros emerged. Probably in his attempt to salvage something from the classic pattern, probably because the whole situation was monstrously inconceivable to a person like him who grew up within Marxism, probably because the situation was tragic (seeing ordinary people coming down from the suburbs ready to be killed, while you knew very well that they would be killed in order to establish concentration camps and a Stalinist dictatorship in this country—for some of these reasons, or maybe for all of them together, after December, Spyros claimed for a while, in an article which—for all I know—no longer exists), that the whole movement was a peculiar military action, echoing militaristic tendencies by some officers of the Communist Army.

On the contrary, in my view, the December movement was, in a certain way, the Revelation not of John but of . . . Josef and of . . . Nicholas.⁵ All these events, the party policy, the behaviour of the masses were completely incompatible with the classic pattern—not only of the Trotskyite, but even of the Leninist and even more, if you want me to be precise, of the Marxist patterns of viewing society and history. These events proved where Stalinism was going; it was quite clear that if Stalinists had taken over power in Greece [...], they would have established a purely Stalinist regime, like the one that existed in Russia, and sooner or later they would have started their purges against all those from the bourgeoisie, the middle class, the left-wing dissidents and anyone else who disagreed with them and wouldn't become their obedient slave. Without boasting, this was confirmed massively by what happened afterwards (we didn't know it then) in Yugoslavia and in other countries, whether a Russian army was present or not. This happened simply because of the might of Stalinist

5 Castoriadis here means Josef Stalin and Nikos Zahariadis (1903–1973), the notorious leader of the Greek Communist Party, who at the time of the December events hinted here by Castoriadis was still a prisoner at the Dachau concentration camp. (Zahariadis, who thought himself as the Greek Stalin, returned to Greece in May 1945 and with his revolutionary zeal contributed to the destructive Greek Civil War in 1947–49).

parties that, naturally, within the conditions of occupation, as in other countries later (Vietnam and elsewhere) in the course of a national liberation struggle, all developed an immense military mechanism on which they relied in order to take over power.

Anyhow, our disagreement didn't last long—maybe until 1945 or the beginning of '46, and then we found ourselves in agreement again. The ideological sequel to this story is none other than the history of ideas of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which Spyros espoused from the beginning till the end, as well as in all other gradual changes and revisions of classical Marxism that took place in the journal and in my writings. Nevertheless, throughout this development, he always returned to the question that I, rightly or wrongly, thought was closed. After we went through the idea of degeneration and we understood that Bolshevism and Lenin himself had no relation to the revolution, why then did both Bolshevism and Lenin appear? And how did they gain the trust of the people? Why did Rosa Luxembourg remain a lonely voice? Why did Marx's theory contain since its inception elements that made such developments possible, if not unavoidable, and also made possible their invocation by all bureaucrats and executioners?

I tried to suggest an answer to these questions. And I think that I answered them to the extent that such a question can be answered. In brief, I answered as follows: that Marx himself and Marxism had been deeply conditioned by the influence of the capitalist imaginary of their time; that all these capitalist elements are integral parts of Marx's work; that all such elements allowed a certain development of ideology for both the Social-Democrats and the Bolsheviks; also that (I have already suggested this in a text entitled "Proletariat and Organisation", published in 1958) the working class themselves had allowed the infiltration of social imaginary significations from capitalism, and had started to believe in their leaders, the specialists, and, consequently, that they allowed the establishment of a bureaucracy which supposedly represented the workers.

Spyros returned to these questions constantly—without ceasing for a single moment to approve and applaud my ideas. I don't know why. Maybe deep down in my answers there was something that didn't suit him. I dare not say that he didn't understand—probably it was not enough for him. Maybe (and this is the tragic element which we can never escape) there was a generational gap. In 1945 I was only 23 years old. To me, the living revolutionary tradition was contained in books. And the first time I saw masses of people rallying in the streets was on December 3rd 1944 in Athens, ready to dismember anyone I thought of as revolutionary and certainly myself.

Spyros' experience was not the same. He had lived through an era when workers were truly revolutionary (at least in certain periods and in different areas). Thessalonica in 1922–23 was always his point of reference. I remember his admiration for the female tobacco workers when they clashed with police using their rubber sandals. Maybe this contributed to the fact that he was unable to accept that, despite the heroic and internationally significant effort of the working class during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, it was impossible to achieve the result that was then believed inevitable. Maybe also the terrible contradiction between the idea of a messianic class, (deep down, that was what it really signified), and the understanding that the same class was continuously backsliding under the influence of alien and hostile elements of a revisionist communist bureaucracy. Maybe all of this didn't allow him to overcome such a persistent obsession.

Definitely, such an idea didn't become an obstacle to him, as he witnessed, understood and enthusiastically espoused the new liberation movements that appeared in the sixties and later; movements by students, youths, women, minorities etc. I think that in the last years of his life he had gone beyond the myth of the working class. Yet he always returned to the question which I could reformulate as: What went wrong? When did the "derailment" start?

And at this point a question emerges that, I would think, is more philosophical. Was there ever a real possibility for a different development of the working class and the various revolutionary movements? Could it be possible that the trends which were so obvious in the Paris Commune, the early Soviets, the Worker's Councils in Germany and North Italy, in 1918 and 1919, in Spain in 1936–37 and especially in Catalonia, might ever have achieved their purposes? I think that, with the exception of the Paris Commune and of the Hungarian Councils after 1956, the fundamental element we have to take into consideration when answering such a question is the following: All such working class movements were very rarely defeated by external enemies. Almost always they collapsed from within, they "degenerated", as we used to say then, that is: they disintegrated under the control of a bureaucracy which they themselves had created.

Without being Hegelian, and criticising *a posteriori*, we can say that without this bureaucracy and the experience of bureaucratisation, the revolutionary movement couldn't have proceeded any further. And we ourselves today wouldn't be able to think that real socialism, namely an autonomous, self-governed and self-instituted society, together with the movement that envisages such a society, were not endangered so much by external enemies but by the very tendency of people to believe in their leaders and experts, resign,

withdraw, and cease the struggle to realise their very autonomy within a collective autonomous movement.

So we return to the contemporary situation and our own present problems. Because what we observe nowadays around us, and what brought Spyros to despair so frequently, is the pervasiveness and the predominance of the characteristics I mentioned earlier, of apathy, privatisation, irresponsibility, of each one's imprisonment within their own little individual space. And this is happening now, in an era when the problems that humanity faces are of crucial importance and threaten the very future of life on the planet.

No one can predict if, how and when we will escape such a situation. What matters is not to make predictions. What matters is that each one of us, wherever we are, even as individuals, even more so when we can act collectively, should continue our struggle for freedom, equality, justice and carry on the struggle for an autonomous society made out of autonomous individuals, a struggle to which Spyros Stinas dedicated his heroic life of martyrdom.

PART 2

Essays on Castoriadis



The Choral Ode from *Antigone*: “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ [...]” Refracted Through Cornelius Castoriadis and Martin Heidegger

Anthony Stephens

Coming from opposite ends of the political spectrum, Cornelius Castoriadis and Martin Heidegger produced world views that stand in stark contrast to one another. The two philosophers did not engage in direct controversy, but they had a common interest in Ancient Greek tragedy. Their contrasting readings of the same canonical text by Sophocles—a famous choral ode, or *stásimon*, from *Antigone*—may offer us an illuminating perspective on precisely where their visions of humanity differ. Martin Heidegger set out an exegesis of this text in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, first delivered as lectures in 1935 and published in German in 1953. In an essay in *Figures of the Thinkable*, Castoriadis adopts a highly critical stance towards this reading of Sophocles. His critique of Heidegger is twofold: first, he accuses him of wilfully distorting the semantics of the Ancient Greek original so as to make Sophocles a precursor of Heidegger’s own thought; second, he represents Heidegger’s reading as fatally determined by his allegiance to Nazism.

In what follows, I shall first establish for English-speaking readers just what aspects of Heidegger’s German version of the *stásimon* by Sophocles provoke Castoriadis’s ire, attempting an adjudication of the points at issue. I shall then test Castoriadis’s claim that the aetiology of Heidegger’s reading is to be found purely in his Nazism. Drawing on Heidegger’s second commentary on the same Sophoclean text, delivered as lectures in 1942 but not published in German till Castoriadis’s views on his first exegesis were already formulated in 1984, the essay goes on to propose a more refined approach to the divergent readings of the text by Sophocles which differentiates the crassly political from such private preoccupations on Heidegger’s part as emerge from his later commentary. In 1942, Heidegger distances himself from the Nazi usurpation of the Ancient Greek *pólis* as a precursor of the Third Reich, but, in doing so, reveals his essentially theological—as opposed to historical—understanding of the age of Sophocles.

The text in question, lines 332–375 in the *Antigone*, is a reflection by the chorus on human nature that prepares the ground for the conflict of attitudes and

wills that will constitute the tragic nexus. It begins by celebrating humanity's dominance over the natural world in various aspects, then changes to the cultural sphere and finally addresses the issue of right conduct in the civil community. Into the generally hymnic tone two negatives intrude: helplessness in the face of death and exclusion from the community as a result of transgressing its laws. Aside from these, there is also an awareness pervading the verse of the mixed and ambiguous nature of human action, its potential for both creation and destruction. It thus anticipates what the irreconcilable opposition between Creon and Antigone will show in detail, whilst indicating that there is a middle way of adherence to law and respect for divine justice. It is a fruitful ground for controversy, precisely because its oscillation of perspectives on human nature lends itself to contrary readings and stresses the elusiveness of the wholesome middle way.

In the preamble to Castoriadis's essay *Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Anthrōpos* contrasting the views of humanity found in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* with those in the famous *stásimon* in *Antigone* by Sophocles, we find the following strong polemic against Heidegger's reading of the Sophoclean text in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

There is a "translation" and extensive "interpretation" by Heidegger of the one stasimon (choral ode) in *Antigone* we shall discuss below, beginning with the famous words *Pollá tá deiná*. This "translation" is essentially a repulsive violation of the Sophoclean text. It supports—and is supported by—an "interpretation" that is, as is almost always the case, a simple projection of Heidegger's patterns of thought. [...] in this particular case, they lead to an artificial and unsound construction, which (1) presents Sophocles' *anthrōpos* as a complete embodiment of Heideggerian *Dasein*, and (2) is characterised, incredibly and monstrously (like everything Heidegger has written about the ancient Greeks) by systematic disregard for the *pólis*, for politics, for democracy and for their central position in ancient Greek creation.¹

This forms the basis of what is to follow. Lest the contest of readings appear too one-sided, it should be emphasised that Heidegger—up till his death in 1976—did not retreat from any of the philosophical positions he had espoused during the Nazi period and was content to see his lectures from those years published substantially just as he had delivered them and without undertaking the obvious amendments that would have made them more congenial to

1 Arnold, H. (2007). (Trans). *Figures of the Thinkable*. p. 2f. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

post-war opinion in Germany, and elsewhere. One may thus assume he stood by his readings of the text by Sophocles until the end. In what follows, I shall therefore first identify the precise grounds for Castoriadis's criticisms, and then attempt an historical contextualisation.

Of necessity, this essay will be a study in translation as well as one of conflicting world views. Dealing with Heidegger in English is never easy, as his German is so notoriously idiosyncratic, using word-plays and exploiting connotations that simply have no English equivalents, that any rendering of his texts into English inevitably impoverishes their semantics. Moreover, so as to make Heidegger more readable in English, translations normalise the eccentricity of his German, which is quite often unintelligible to the average background German speaker of today. Heidegger incessantly coins neologisms and resurrects archaisms that are simply opaque in a modern German context. In this instance, things are further complicated by the fact that there are three different English translations of Heidegger's rendering of the Sophoclean choral ode in circulation: first by Ralph Manheim in his translation of *An Introduction to Metaphysics* of 1959; that of Gregory Fried and Richard Polt in their new translation of the same book of 2000; and that by William McNeill and Julia Davis in their translation *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* of 1996. This issue is not trivial for two reasons: first, Castoriadis addresses his criticisms directly to Heidegger's German text; secondly, all the English translations of Heidegger in print are different from one another in significant details so that it is far from easy to address some of Castoriadis's specific points through an English version.

This difficulty arises even with the opening words of the Sophoclean text in question. I have given them first in the original Greek to signal a fundamental linguistic problem. Without going into specific issues of rendering Heidegger's German for the moment, it is clear from looking at a small selection of English versions of *Antigone* by Sophocles that they differ greatly in their rendering of the adjective *deinòs*. There is a clear reason for this, which becomes apparent if one consults Liddell and Scott's definitive Greek lexicon. The word has a very broad scale of potential meanings, and if one wishes to render it by any one word in English or German, then one is forced into a choice, basically one between the "terrifying" and the "marvellous". Robert Fagles's literary translation avoids the choice, by including both ends of the scale: thus "Numberless wonders/terrible wonders walk the world but none the match for man—".² In

2 Sophocles. (1984). Fagles, R. (Trans.). Knox, B. (Intro.). *The Three Theban Plays*. p. 76. London: Penguin Books; Hugh Lloyd-Jones opts for: "Many things are formidable, and none more formidable than man!" (*Sophocles*. (1994). *Antigone. Women of Trachis. Philoctetes. Oedipus at*

the second essay in *Figures of the Thinkable, Notes on Some Poetic Resources*, Castoriadis returns to the *stásimon* in question and insists on the fundamental ambiguity of *deinòs*, for he sees both contrary aspects of humanity, the dreadful and the wonderful, as being manifest in their capacity for self-transformation by learning from themselves, whereas, as he says, “the gods did not teach themselves anything; they did not modify themselves. They are what they have always been since they came into existence and what they will be forever [...] But mortal man, infinitely weaker than the gods, is more *deinòs* because he creates and creates himself.”³

Before assessing any of Heidegger’s choices, there is another point to be made. Castoriadis’s criticisms of Heidegger relate to the translation and commentary on Sophocles’ text in the *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, which was presented by Heidegger as lectures in the summer of 1935, but first published in German in 1953. Castoriadis does not seem to have been aware of Heidegger’s second reading of the same *stásimon* from *Antigone*, delivered in lectures from the summer of 1942 within the framework of an interpretation of Friedrich Hölderlin’s late hymn *Der Ister* (*The Danube*), which dates from 1802. The notes to the French edition of Castoriadis’s essays of 1999 reveal that his thoughts on Aeschylus and Sophocles were first presented in seminars in 1984, the same year in which the German text of Heidegger’s lectures on *Der Ister* was first published.⁴ There is no evidence he was aware of Heidegger’s much longer exegesis in this later volume, but it is unlikely that reading it would have moderated his critique of Heidegger, since Heidegger revives in 1942 the salient points of his textual commentary on the *stásimon* of 1935.

From 1934 onwards, Hölderlin’s late poetry had assumed an authoritative role in Heidegger’s thinking, as I have shown elsewhere.⁵ During the Second World War, his preferred lecture topics were detailed interpretations of Hölderlin’s late hymns. Unless one had advance knowledge, there would be no reason to suspect that Heidegger, in his lectures on *Der Ister*, might suddenly

Colonus. p. 35. Cambridge, Mass, London: Harvard University Press; E.F. Watling renders the line: “Wonders are many on earth, and the greatest of these/Is man [...]” (*Sophocles*. (1974). *The Theban Plays*. p. 135. London: Penguin Books.)

3 *Figures of the Thinkable*, p. 28.

4 Cf. Anthony Stephens, A. (2008). Karalis, V. (ed.). *Cutting Poets to Size—Heidegger, Hölderlin, Rilke in Heidegger and the Aesthetics of Living*. pp. 16–19. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

5 *Ibid.*

switch from discussing Hölderlin to an extended commentary on a tragedy by Sophocles, one, moreover, which pays scant attention to Hölderlin's own complete translation of the *Antigone*.⁶ Whilst Heidegger's later translation of the *stásimon* differs in only a few trivial details from that of 1935, the commentary justifying it, seven years later, has grown much longer. Castoriadis therefore criticises Heidegger's commentary in support of his translation only in the version first published in 1953.

So as to provide a firm basis for the following discussion, I have done a new rendering of Heidegger's translation of *stásimon* by Sophocles which appears as an Appendix. For this purpose, I disregarded the Sophoclean original and also refrained from normalising Heidegger's German at any point. Words and phrases to which Castoriadis takes exception are underlined, and neologisms on Heidegger's part appear in italics. Any of the modern renderings into English of *Antigone* mentioned in the notes may serve as a comparison. Castoriadis does not offer a whole translation of his own, but objects to specific points in Heidegger's version. To begin with Castoriadis's first objection: he states the "critical word" of the first line is obviously the "untranslatable" *deinòs*, which—as he says—Heidegger translates "with the terribly insufficient *unheimlich* (uncanny), which forgets several of the word's central significations".⁷ It is certainly surprising to find *das Unheimliche* as Heidegger's single choice. It is a stock item in the vocabulary of German Romanticism, and in 1919 Sigmund Freud had published a well-known essay devoted to just this concept, which he establishes as highly ambiguous and which he elucidates mainly by reference to the only successful horror-story in German, E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (*The Sandman*), written in the Romantic period. For Freud, the word suggests experiences in which "the border between fantasy and reality becomes blurred" and, inevitably, he relates these back to traumas of childhood.⁸ Does Heidegger imply anything like this? Obviously not. Apart from anything else, he is presenting a lecture-series in Germany in 1935, as a committed National Socialist who praises "the inner truth and greatness

6 Hölderlin's translation of the *Antigone* was published in 1803 and has remained more of a curiosity than a canonical rendering. It shows distinct traces of his descent into the mental illness that was to beset him for the rest of his long life. Moreover, he had no access to the best editions of the Sophoclean play then available, and his command of Ancient Greek was far from perfect. Heidegger states no reason for largely ignoring Hölderlin's version of the *stásimon*, but it is evident that it would not have suited his purposes in a number of ways.

7 *Figures of the Thinkable*, p. 14.

8 Freud, S. (2000). p. 267. *Studienausgabe. Vol. IV, Psychologische Schriften*, Fischer/Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt: Frankfurt am Main.

of this movement".⁹ Hence the last thing he would want to call to mind is any association with a banned Jewish thinker. *Das Unheimliche* also resists translation into English, and "uncanny", despite its Freudian associations, is the least misleading approximation.

How does Heidegger get to this term? He uses a technique he is fond of elsewhere, namely to quote a standard meaning: "the terrible", only first to complicate it and then discard it. Acknowledging *deinòs* is highly ambiguous, he first seems to settle on *gewaltig*, which derives from *Gewalt*, force, power¹⁰—but the ambiguity which he finds in *deinòs* is not that which we find in all the Greek lexica. Rather it is between an impersonal force, which Fried and Polt render into English—for reasons I totally fail to understand—as "the sway" and a second force which humanity exercises as "violence".¹¹ So, in place of the usual semantic polarisation between "terrifying" and "marvellous", we get a somewhat tautological version of *Gewalt* which Fried and Polt translate as follows: "But humanity is *deinòn*, first inasmuch as it remains exposed to this overwhelming sway, because it essentially belongs to Being. However, humanity is also *deinòn* because it is violence-doing in the sense we have indicated."¹² To put this in more simple terms: if Being is intrinsically violent, then everything that partakes of Being is also violent, humanity and the rest of the cosmos included. I fail to see any ambiguity—or, for that matter, originality here. Empedocles, after all, saw "strife" as the principal force shaping this world.¹³

I can, however, understand Castoriadis's indignation, since Heidegger has neatly done away with most of the possible meanings of *deinòs* in Greek. But he is still a long way from equating *deinòs* with *das Unheimliche*. How does he get there? Simply: he resorts to another of his favourite strategies, namely the leap into etymology. Change a few letters in *unheimlich* and you get *unheimisch*, meaning "not native to" or "not at home in". Heidegger wants a humanity that is not at home in the world, and *unheimlich* helps him get there. For the close synonyms *unheimlich/unheimisch* open the way to a wealth of terms deriving from the stem-word *Heim*, but lacking ready English equivalents. So Fried and Polt's rendering of Heidegger's chain of associations cannot help but sound somewhat bizarre, since English does not have the same set of

9 Heidegger, M. (2000). Fried, G. and Polt, R. (Trans). *Introduction to Metaphysics*. p. 213. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

10 Heidegger, M. (1953). *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. p. 115. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

11 Cf. Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 159: "The *deinón* is the terrible in the sense of the overwhelming sway [...]"

12 Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 160.

13 Barnes, J. (1987). *Early Greek Philosophy*. pp. 166–172. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

derivatives.¹⁴ What it boils down to, is that humanity—for Heidegger—is *deinòs*, is *unheimlich* because it is not at home in the world and commits violent acts in respect of what overwhelms it. As George Steiner put it very neatly in his study *Antigones*, of 1984: “The great tragic current of ‘exilic’ sentiment after Kant is summarised in Heidegger’s image of man as ‘a stranger in the house of Being’”.¹⁵ Steiner quite rightly points out that this ends a tradition of looking at humanity, rather than inaugurating anything original. In 1922 Rainer Maria Rilke had asserted in the *First Duino Elegy*: “[...] that we are not very reliably at home in the world we interpret”,¹⁶ and similar statements of humanity’s fundamental estrangement from reality are legion in German literature and philosophy in the years before 1935.

What Castoriadis asks, however, is: does this have anything to do with the central import of the Sophoclean choral ode? We have seen that Heidegger has used chains of verbal association, rather than philology or anything resembling logic, to equate the term in Sophocles with his own preferred rendering. But what if we look at the text by Sophocles as a whole? The first two strophes are taken up with celebrating humanity’s mastery over nature, indeed over the immortal Earth herself. It is hard to find much exile or estrangement there. Sophocles then turns to celebrating human faculties and skills, and it is on this point that Castoriadis and Heidegger collide again.

Humanity acquires speech and thought, and the question is: how? Sophocles uses the term *edidáxato*, which some English translators render as “learned”—others, among them Robert Fagles, opt for “he has taught himself”.¹⁷ We find the equivalent emphasis in the standard German equivalent of the Loeb Classical Library parallel text: “lehrte er sich”.¹⁸ If we seek a reason for this consonance, it is because Sophocles uses the middle voice, a grammatical form that has a reflexive meaning. Castoriadis is equally insistent on this: “*Anthrōpos* has taught—created for—himself speech (*phthégma*) and thought

14 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 161: “We understand the un-canny as that which throws one out of the “canny”, that is, the homely [...]. The unhomely does not allow us to be at home. Therein lies the over-whelming. But human beings are the uncanniest [...] because, as those who do violence, they overstep the limits of the homely, precisely in the direction of the uncanny in the sense of the overwhelming.”

15 Steiner, G. (1984). *Antigones*. p. 15. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

16 Rilke Rainer, M. (1955). *Sämtliche Werke*. vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag. p. 685: “daß wir nicht sehr verlässlich zu Haus sind/in der gedeuteten Welt.”

17 *The Three Theban Plays*, p. 67.

18 Sophokles. (1981). Zink, N. (Ed. & Trans). *Antigone. Griechisch/Deutsch*. Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag. p. 33.

(*phrómena*)[...].¹⁹ This point is central to Castoriadis main argument that humanity is not merely terrifying, but above all marvellously creative, with the *pólis* representing their crowning achievement.

Heidegger's version of this turn of phrase is highly idiosyncratic. Unnoticed by his English translators, who have humanity somehow 'finding their way' into language and thought,²⁰ Heidegger uses a fixed phrase in German: "sich in etwas finden + accusative" which means to come to terms with something pre-existing, usually to reconcile oneself with a situation that cannot be changed. What it does is to abolish the force of the middle voice *edidáxato*, which has humanity going beyond their mastery over nature by teaching themselves the means to develop into social beings. Heidegger's implication is thus to increase human helplessness in the face of the Overwhelming, and have them adapt to these pre-existent faculties, whose origin is never explained anywhere in his commentary. On the contrary, he is quite scathing on developmental views of human society—and this despite the recent emergence of the well-ordered National Socialist state from the 'democratic chaos' of the Weimar Republic.²¹ What private reasons Heidegger may have had for casting a cold eye on social change in all its forms, ancient and modern, will be addressed later.

The next point of contention is *astunómous orgàs*, which Liddell and Scott's comprehensive lexicon, specifically referring to this passage in the *Antigone*, renders as "feelings of law-abiding or social life". Fagles has "the mood and the mind for law that rules the city".²² Heidegger's rendering is literally "the courage of dominance over cities". Castoriadis takes Heidegger sternly to task, saying he has:

translated [this], in explicitly Nazi fashion, as the 'passion for dominating the cities' (*den Mut der Herrschaft über die Städte*). This translation is, moreover, aberrant. For there to be domination of the cities, there must first be cities. Sophocles does not speak of domination of allegedly

19 *Figures of the Thinkable*, p. 17.

20 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 157: "Into the sounding of the word, as well, and into wind-swift understanding/he found his way [...]"

21 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 165: "In this way we have also warded off the other opinion, according to which the ode recounts the development of humanity from a wild huntsman [...] to a builder of cities and person of culture. These are notions from cultural anthropology and the psychology of primitives. They arise from falsely transferring a science of nature that is already untrue in itself to human Being. [...] The inception is what is most uncanny and mightiest. What follows is not a development but flattening down as mere widening out; it is the inability to hold onto the inception."

22 *The Three Theban Plays*, p. 77.

already existing cities: his standpoint is the very “moment”, (on the ontological stratum), when *anthrōpos* creates language and thought as well as *astunómous orgàs*, the instituting passions, the passionate temper, the dispositions and drives, that give laws to cities—that institute cities. Instituting passions—this is possibly the best way to render Sophocles’ extraordinary and profoundly true idea: extraordinary because we usually think of law and institutions as something absolutely opposed to temper or passion, and profoundly true because there is a prelogical intention and “will” at the root of the primordial institution, and no institution can hold without passion.²³

To be fair to Heidegger, he has “courage” rather than “passion”, and it is drawing a long bow indeed to attach the label “Nazi” to this particular turn of phrase. To do so requires an association with the simplified view of Nietzsche’s “will to power” that was certainly in vogue in Nazi Germany. Such connections may well have been in the minds of many of Heidegger’s original audience, but they are not a necessary consequence of his translation of Sophocles. The main thrust of Heidegger’s discourse would have been met by the vast majority of National Socialists with blank incomprehension, for, while Heidegger has no quarrel with the regime or its direction, the highest values he posits lie elsewhere, namely in the mythical “inception” and not in the present or proximate future.²⁴

However that be, Castoriadis’s reading of the text in terms of a progression from a mastery over nature to the invention of the means that make social being possible makes better sense in terms of the whole breadth of meanings *deinòs* may have. Thought, language and social institutions have to come from somewhere, and it seems to do no violence to the text by Sophocles to suggest they are marvellous human inventions. Heidegger not only flatly denies this reading, but even calls it a delusion that shows “how estranged humanity is from its own essence”. For him, language, thought and society “are no less a part of the overwhelming violence than sea, earth and animal”, thus leaving the question as to *how* they arise in the first place totally obscure.²⁵ They are simply there, as pre-existent as natural phenomena, and humanity literally

23 *Figures of the Thinkable*, p. 17.

24 Cf. *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 166: “Instead, the genuineness and greatness of historical knowing lie in understanding the character of this inception as a mystery.”

25 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 166.

“takes them over”—“übernehmen”²⁶—which, understandably, makes these even more “unheimlich”. It would indeed be fairly uncanny to go to sleep as a mute, unthinking hunter-gatherer and wake up next morning as an eloquent, intellectual citizen of a Greek *pólis*.

But then we get to a real impasse. Castoriadis accuses Heidegger of falsifying the syntax of the original. Heidegger does this by leaving out the sentence-break after *pantopóros*—meaning—“all resourceful”, “never without resources”, then running the sentence on so as to have humanity arrive at Nothing. To achieve this, Castoriadis points out, Heidegger “must covertly omit the words ‘the future’ (*tò méllon*)”.²⁷ Indeed he does leave these out and he does omit as well the customary sentence break after *pantopóros*: “all-resourceful”. The result is the somewhat impenetrable, long sentence: “Everywhere setting out underway, without experience, with no way out/he comes to Nothing”.²⁸ Other translations do break the sentence after “all-resourceful” and attach the words *tò méllon* to *oudèn*—“nothing”—so that we find in Hugh Lloyd-Jones’ Loeb Classical Library edition: “he meets nothing in the future without resource”,²⁹ or in Fagles’ more literary version: “Never without resources, never an impasse as he marches on the future”.³⁰ The standard German translation has literally: “he approaches nothing in the future without resources”.³¹

Heidegger’s omission is not accidental. He uses exactly the same words in 1935 and 1942, and when the text of 1935 appeared in print in 1953, he amended it in a few trivial instances, but not here. The intention of his reading is quite plain: it is to keep humanity estranged from its own mode of being. For, if humanity is so resourceful that it is ready to encounter anything in the future, with the sole exception of death, then it is at home in the world it has in part created and not estranged from its own essence at all. The ability to cope with what the future may hold is a measure of the accuracy with which humanity has assessed the present. Far from just perpetrating violence in a violent world, humanity has used language, thought and their social instincts to make them-

26 Cf. *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 119: “Der Unterschied ist nur der, daß dieses den Menschen umwaltet und trägt, bedrängt und befeuert, während Jenes ihn durchwaltet als solches, was er als das Seiende, das er selbst ist, eigens zu übernehmen hat.”

27 *Figures of the Thinkable*, p. 3.

28 *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 113: “Überall hinausfahrend unterwegs, erfahrungslos ohne Ausweg/kommt er zum Nichts.”

29 Sophocles. *Antigone*, p. 37.

30 *The Three Theban Plays*, p. 77.

31 Sophocles. *Antigone*, p. 33. “Verlegen geht er an nichts/Künftiges”.

selves at home to the extent that they anticipate future problems. The limitation on this is, of course, that no one escapes death.

Heidegger's agenda becomes even clearer when we come to compounds of the vexed word "*pólis*". As with *deinòs*, Heidegger uses the technique of conceding the usual meanings of "city" or "city state" and then dismissing them as inadequate. His replacement word in German is "Stätte", which simply means "place". Used by itself, it is elevated and archaic in today's German, but it survives in common compounds like "Gaststätte"—pub or bistro—"Ruhestätte"—"resting place" or the Biblical "Schädelstätte"—Golgotha, the place of a skull. For *pólis* Heidegger coins in his exegesis the neologism "Geschichtsstätte" or "history-place", but, strangely, keeps this longer form out of his translation of the choral ode. In his commentary, he then claims that Sophocles means: "use violence as violence-doers and become those who rise high in historical Being as creators, as doers. Rising high in the site of history [*Geschichtsstätte*] they also become *apólis*, without city and site, lonesome, un-canny, with no way out amidst beings as a whole [...]" So we are back once more to a humanity defined by isolation, violence, estranged from its own Being and encountering nothingness. Heidegger has thus reversed the conventional meaning of the lines, which Hugh Lloyd-Jones renders: "When he applies the laws of the earth and the justice the gods have sworn to uphold he is high in the city; outcast from the city is he with whom the ignoble consorts because of his recklessness."³²

This is a crucial juncture in the reading of the *stásimon*, for the chorus seems here to assert that there is a middle way, by which humanity can avoid disaster, but it involves a right understanding of law and justice and an avoidance of the extremes of human passion. The word *apólis* has a second meaning in Ancient Greek, which is implicit here and which Liddell and Scott render, citing this line from Sophocles, as "no true citizen". Thus the word has the concrete sense of being banished, exiled, but one may also be *apólis*, whilst remaining physically within the community, by adopting a stance contrary to the principles that sustain any *pólis*. Both Creon and Antigone will reveal themselves in different ways as being *apólis*, and their failures to espouse a mediate way is the essence of the tragedy. It thus seems highly eccentric of Heidegger to posit a humanity that has "no way out", whilst the Sophoclean chorus is indicating that there is one and that it can be followed under certain conditions.

Needless to say, Castoriadis will have none of Heidegger's reading. In his terms, humanity becomes:

32 Sophocles. *Antigone*, p. 37.

hypsipolis: 'standing high within one's city', but even more, great, (sublime, as in Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime*) as member of a city, of a political (hence, human) community. At once, an opposition is drawn; against *hypsipolis* emerges *apólis*, a man who [...] because of [...] *húbris* [...] allows the *mē kalòn*, the opposite of the beautiful/good to inhabit him. Whoever is possessed by *húbris* departs from the political society of humans [...].³³

As the tragedy will show in the case of Creon, "standing high within one's city" has latent in it the abrupt descent into being "no true citizen".³⁴ Heidegger's rendering of the words: "*hótō tò mē kalòn/xúnesti tólmās xárin*" as "dem immer das Unseinde seiend"—"for whom the Non-existent always exists"—transforms what is merely "not beautiful/honourable" into an ontological puzzle, and, in doing so, leaves Sophocles far behind. Fagles renders the clause: "who weds himself to inhumanity/thanks to reckless daring"³⁵—a regrettable proclivity of real-life tyrants.

Once more, it is needful to separate the philological impact of Castoriadis's point-scoring from the political thrust of his polemics. For the humanity that emerges from Heidegger's reading would be equally out of place in a National Socialist state as in a democracy. While using "violence as violence-doers" and thus becoming "those who rise high in historical Being" might well be intelligible to Heidegger's original audience in political terms, it is for him merely a transitional phase to a state in which humanity is "without city and site, lonesome, un-canny, with no way out"—one that is quite incompatible with the National Socialist utopia which seemed well within reach in 1935.

The elaborate lengths to which Heidegger goes to avoid the obvious meanings of *pólis* are intriguing. Lecturing in 1935, he may well have wanted to avoid any connotations of democracy, since that was something Germany had emphatically left behind. In 1942, he gives the avoidance of the obvious meaning a different spin. By then, Nazi academics had convinced themselves that

33 *Figures of the Thinkable*, p. 12.

34 Segal, C. (1981). *Tragedy and Civilisation, An Interpretation of Sophocles*. p. 168. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press: "Creon's limited view of civilisation makes him 'citiless' when he seems 'high in his city'; Antigone's heroic defence of one set of 'laws of the earth', far more literally than the chorus means here, makes her 'high in her city' (see 692ff., 733) at a moment when she is legally and literally *apolis* (see 508, 656, 'alone of all the city'). Creon is subsequently revealed as a bane to the city (1015, 1080). As leader after a civil war, he seems to have restored a divided unity of the polis. That unity now shatters about him [...]."

35 *The Three Theban Plays*, p. 77.1.

the Athenian city-state was the historical pre-figuration of National Socialism, and so in his lectures on *Der Ister*, Heidegger becomes sarcastic:

Today [...] one can scarcely read a treatise or a book on the Greeks without everywhere being assured that here, with the Greeks, “everything” is “politically” determined. In the majority of “research results”, the Greeks appear as the pure National Socialists. This over-enthusiasm on the part of academics seems not even to notice that with such “results” it does National Socialism and its historical uniqueness no service at all, not that it needs this anyhow. These enthusiasts are now suddenly discovering the “political” everywhere.³⁶

So a Nazified Sophocles does not suit either—much as Heidegger still respects the “historical uniqueness” of National Socialism—because he is determined that Sophoclean humanity will be not only defined by violence but also as essentially non-communal. Any belongingness to a community is going to distract individuals, when not engaged in committing acts of violence, from brooding on their essential estrangement from Being, so any community is a necessary evil. Thus he resorts to the terminology he had coined in 1935:

The unhomely one is deprived of the homely; deprivation is the way in which the unhomely one possesses the homely, or to put it more precisely, the way in which whatever is homely possesses the unhomely one. What becomes manifest in these relations is the essence of uncanniness itself, namely, presencing in the manner of absencing, and in such a way that whatever presences and absences here is simultaneously the open realm of all presencing and absencing.³⁷

This is a very incongruous message to be sending an audience of young Germans who are about to be harnessed into the war effort, but it is the quintessential Heidegger. Whilst in the lectures on *Der Ister* Heidegger displays much more interest in the plot of the *Antigone* than he had in 1935, his efforts to denude the concept of *pólis* of its accepted meanings are unrelenting. In 1942 he does still give this undertaking a nationalist slant: “For in the future we ourselves must, in relation to ourselves, think more German [*sic!*] than all Germans hitherto; for nothing passed down to us can directly bestow what is

36 Heidegger, M. (1996). McNeill, W. & Davis Bloomington, J. (Trans). Hölderlin's Hymn “The Ister”. p. 79f. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

37 Heidegger, p. 75.

essential [...]”.³⁸ But an enhanced nationalism is not the ultimate goal towards which his discourse strives. Once again, the tendency is to dissolve all concrete meanings of community: “Perhaps the πόλις is that realm and locale around which everything question-worthy and uncanny turns in an exceptional sense. The πόλις is πόλος, that is, the pole, the swirl [*Wirbel*] in which and around which everything turns. [...] The polar concerns beings in that around which such beings, as manifest, themselves turn.”³⁹ This reveals once more the recurrent thought pattern that characterises Heidegger’s public utterances in the years 1933–45. National Socialism is always affirmed; ‘Germanness’ is always a positive value, but in the end these are surpassed by glosses on “Being” which are much more individualistic and recondite and which privilege the realm of “Beginnings”.

In conclusion, I see no way past agreeing with Castoriadis that Heidegger has distorted the Sophoclean text for his own purposes. Castoriadis’s own reading is not tendentiously socialist, but simply follows the mainstream of scholarship. There remains the further question of whether Heidegger reinvents Sophocles *because* he is a Nazi—as Castoriadis argues—or for some other reason or reasons. When in 1935 Heidegger delivered the lectures that we know as *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he had already failed as a Nazi academic politician, and the passages in which he explicitly praises the “inner truth and greatness” of Nazism are separate from his discussion of the Sophoclean text.⁴⁰ When he delivers the lectures of 1942, it is in anticipation of the entry of the USA into the European war but still in a mood of expectation of a German victory:

We know today that the Anglo-Saxon world of Americanism has resolved to annihilate Europe, that is, the homeland [*Heimat*], that means the commencement of the Western world. Whatever has the character of commencement is indestructible.[...] The concealed spirit of the commencement in the West will not even have the look of contempt for this trial of self-devastation [of that which is] without commencement [i.e.

38 Heidegger, p. 81; cf. Heidegger Martin. (1984). *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923–1944. Band 53. Hölderlins Hymne “Der Ister”*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, p. 100: “Denn wir selbst müssen in bezug auf uns selbst künftighin deutscher denken als alle bisherigen Deutschen; denn keine Überlieferung verschenkt unmittelbar das Wesentliche [...]”.

39 Heidegger, M. *Gesamtausgabe. II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1923–1944*.

40 On Heidegger’s difficulties with the National Socialist establishment and his subsequent withdrawal from active political engagement, cf. Safranski, R. (1998). Osers, E. (trans). *Martin Heidegger. Between Good and Evil*. pp. 278–290. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press. pp. 278–290.

America], but will await its stellar hour from out of the releasement and tranquillity that belong to the commencement. We only half-think what is historical in history, that is, we do not think it at all, if we calculate history and its magnitude in terms of the length and duration of what has been, rather than awaiting that which is coming and futural in what has first been seen as the commencement.⁴¹

Here Heidegger, in the preamble to his much longer discussion of Sophocles' text, takes up again the ideas of 1935 whereby: "The inception is what is most uncanny and mightiest."⁴² This "inception" or "commencement" is a "mystery".⁴³ It is less of a mystery to anyone familiar with the elaborate cosmic mythology which Hölderlin had developed in his late hymns, in which the beginning and end of history are sacred and the present age always profane. These values dictate much of Heidegger's thinking from 1934 on and make his pronouncements on history much more applicable to a mythical world with such stark antitheses than to the confusions and relativism of his own times.

Somehow 'profane' history has to be separated off from 'genuine', indeed 'sacred' history. This imperative accounts for his criticism of the distortion of Ancient Greece by Nazi scholars because they project too much politics—albeit of the approved kind—onto it. As he insists in 1942: "*The πόλις cannot be determined 'politically'.* The πόλις, and precisely it, is therefore not a 'political' concept. This is indeed how things stand, provided that we wish to remain serious in our reflections and follow a clean [*sic!*] train of thought".⁴⁴ Heidegger's attack on the unnamed Nazi scholars is rather like Castoriadis's much later criticism of Heidegger himself: both argue a projection of beliefs onto the wrong target. The objection seems to be, in Heidegger's terms at least, against presuming to imply that there *were* any politics in Ancient Greece at all. This is manifestly absurd, as are his contortions to get *pólis* in its usual meanings excluded from Sophocles' choral ode. The trouble is—I submit—that Heidegger's conceptualising of the Ancient Greeks is theological, rather than historical. Ancient Greece is a "Beginning" in a sacred sense. In these terms,

41 "The Ister", p. 54f.; this translation is less than perfect—"trial" would be better rendered "process" and "releasement" simply as "calm".

42 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 165.

43 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 166.

44 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 81; for the original formulation of the end of this quotation cf. "Der Ister" p. 91: "[...] daß wir im Ernst der Besinnung und in der Sauberkeit der Gedankenfolge bleiben wollen".

beginnings are pure, politics is impure, hence there was no politics in Ancient Greece.

I think it is reasonable to see, with Heidegger's biographer Rüdiger Safranski, a personal trauma as the basis of all this. Initially Heidegger had seen, in the rise of Nazism, a new beginning in terms of the union of philosophy with politics. His failure in the practical arena is reflected six months later in the opening lectures of the *Introduction to Metaphysics* where there are long, gloomy passages in which he laments "this darkening age: the flight of the gods, [...] the reduction of human beings to a mass", [...] a "*disempowering of the spirit*".⁴⁵ He cannot, of course, overtly blame Nazism. As Safranski says:

Heidegger had viewed the Nazi revolution as a force resisting the disastrous development of the modern age. [...] But in 1935 he was seeing a danger that the best of impulses were being frittered away and falling victim to "the dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organisation of the average man" (EM, 28). In this situation it was up to the philosopher to preserve and defend the original truth of the revolutionary new beginning. He must arm himself with patience. [...] After philosophy's unsuccessful seizure of power, Heidegger once more returns to a solitary philosophy that, on Hölderlin's model, hopes to fend off the "darkening of the world" in single combat. His failed excursion into politics at least had taught him one thing—"the preparation of the true" is not achieved overnight. [...] In such a place of "metaphysical need," the spirits, whether Hölderlin or Heidegger, must hold out to keep awake the memory of what is still missing.⁴⁶

Such Quixotic undertakings need bolstering by authorities. Heidegger's primal authority was to be and remain a Hölderlin cast in Heidegger's own image, but then there was no way round the fact that Hölderlin's primary authorities were the poets of Ancient Greece, and so regrettably, I think—Sophocles is harnessed to become the advocate of a view of humanity that is bizarrely Heideggerian: anti-social, estranged from Being and violent but in no way creative. To make this even faintly plausible, the *stásimon* needs either to be lifted out of context, as in the lectures of 1935, or else be enveloped in swathes of obscure and repetitive paraphrase, as in those of 1942. Through both readings of Sophocles one may, at this remove, glimpse an esoteric critique of what Nazism had already become for Heidegger's private, philosophical world.

45 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 47.

46 *Heidegger: M. Between Good and Evil*, p. 289f.

He had ample opportunity to make significant changes to his *Einführung in die Metaphysik* before its publication in 1953, but as his persistent silence on Nazi genocide shows, Heidegger was never one to recant.

Heidegger's first revamping of Sophocles incenses Castoriadis, since he is intent on understanding the *Antigone* as a tragedy free from mystification and quite intelligible in social terms. For him, reading the tragedy cannot be divorced from what is acceptable and not acceptable in terms of the *pólis*, as generations of scholars have interpreted it. The *Antigone* is, in these terms, a drama whose plot densely interweaves the actions of individuals with the just claims upon them which the community may make. Heidegger is fully aware of this reading and chooses to dismiss or ignore it quite blatantly, because revamping Sophocles' text—for him—offers a canonical authority which can be put in the service of an eschatological vision of contemporary Europe. If Castoriadis clearly offers by far the more faithful reading of Sophocles, then it is in part because he and Heidegger were waging rather different battles on what only appears to be the same battlefield.

Appendix

Literal translation of Heidegger's version of: πολλά τὰ δεινά [...]

Source: *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 112f.

(The translations Castoriadis specifically objects to are underlined; neologisms of Heidegger's own coining are in italics.)

Manifold the uncanny, yet nothing
 more uncanny than humanity moves towering beyond.
 They sail out on the foaming flood
 amid the southern storm of winter
 and cruise in the mountain-range
 of the *raging chasms* of the waves.
 Also the most sublime of the gods, the Earth,
 the *indestructibly* effortless, they tire out,
 overturning her from year to year,
 driving this way and that with their horses
 their ploughs.

Also the lightly hovering swarm of birds
 they snare, and hunt
 the *beast-folk* of the wilderness

and the *living things* native to the sea,
 man (*sic!*) thinking wherever he is.⁴⁷
 He overcomes the beast with cunning
 that spends its nights on mountains and roams,
 the coarse-maned neck of the horse
 and the never-tamed bull,
 circling their necks with wood,
 he compels into the yoke.

Also he adapted to the *sounding* of words
 and to *wind-swift all-understanding*, also to the courage
of dominance over cities.

Also he has considered how he might escape
 exposure to the arrows
 of the storms, also of the *hostile* frosts.
Everywhere setting out underway, without experience, with no way out
he comes to Nothing.

The only assault he can never
 ward off by any flight [is] that of death
 even if he achieves, confronted with dire illness,
 skillful evasion.

Mastering—indeed beyond hope—*cunning*,
 because [it is] the *making* of capability,
 on the one hand he succumbs to what is bad,
 on the other again he achieves what is worthy.
 Between the law of the Earth
 and the gods' sworn *ordinance* he travels.
Towering high above the place, he comes to lose the place,
for whom the *Non-existent* always exists,
for the sake of daring.
 Let him not become an intimate of my hearth,
 nor let my knowing share in his delusion,
 who puts this into practice.

47 At this point Heidegger changes from using “*der Mensch*” which, like *anthrōpos*, is grammatically masculine but not gender-specific in meaning, to “*der Mann*”, which he uses for the remainder of his translation.

Aesthetics and Autonomy

Andrew Cooper

Cry sorrow, sorrow—yet let good prevail!

*So be it! Yet what is good? And who
Is God? How name him, and speak true?
If he accept the name that men
Give him, Zeus I name him then.
I, still perplexed in mind,
For long have searched and weighed
Every hope of comfort or of aid:
Still I can find
No creed to lift this heaviness,
This fear that haunts without excuse—
No name inviting faith, no wistful guess,
Save only—Zeus.*

*Zeus, whose will has marked for man
The sole way where wisdom lies;
Ordered one eternal plan:
Man must suffer to be wise.¹*

THE CHORUS, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

In a lecture given in 1992 at the *École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, Castoriadis raises the question of the meaning of art. What is the meaning of the inexplicable moment of pleasure, the *je ne sais quoi*, we experience when faced with a great work of art? Castoriadis's answer is both illuminating and enigmatic. He suggests that such moments do not disclose a particular meaning, but the being of meaningfulness itself: the 'meaning of meaningfulness and the meaningfulness of meaning.'² In this formulation, artistic representation

1 Aeschylus, (1956) *Agamemnon*, ll, pp. 140, 142–170, 175–178. In Vellacott, P. (Trans). *The Oresteian Trilogy*. England: Penguin Books.

2 Castoriadis, C. (2007). *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*, Éditions Du Seuil, Paris. p. 153. All translations of this text are my own.

has the ability to dethrone the established significations that structure experience and to confront us with the foundational being of meaning that precedes our representational activity. Thus art has a paradoxical reality, for it is both 'a window into the abyss' and 'the creation of a cosmos'; it unveils the abyssal being of meaning and at the very moment it gives form to the abyss.³

The intention of this paper is to identify the philosophical implications of the paradox of art in relation to Castoriadis's project, giving particular focus to the increasing emphasis he gave to artistic representation toward the end of his philosophical development. I will suggest that his later interest in artistic representation, particularly in his lectures from the mid-1980s and into the 1990s, is not subsidiary to his major works. Rather, in this period Castoriadis identifies the aesthetic as a distinct mode of perception in a way that clarifies and expands his earlier work on the imagination. In particular, this paper will address the extensive role played by the Greek tragedies in the latter years of Castoriadis's work to develop his understanding of autonomy not simply as self-institution but, paradoxically, as a *tradition*. Tragedy gives the spectators a critical relation to their tradition, unveiling the chaotic ground of inherited institutions so as to open them for modification. They present antinomic realities in order to disrupt the inherited paths of political reasoning and making epistemic claims, rejecting the possibility of political 'knowledge' and revealing that judgment is the only mode of cognition operative in the political sphere, a mode of cognition that is subject to human limitations. Thus for Castoriadis the tragedies have distinct philosophical implications, for they cleave a gap between what Aristotle would later call knowledge (*episteme*) and practical wisdom (*phronesis*). From the tragic view, the political project is one of self-limitation whereby each citizen refuses to approach a decision with a pre-determined idea and instead engages in deliberation. Castoriadis returns to the tragedies to retrieve what has been lost in contemporary society: a public institution that orientates its citizens toward the task of self-instituting, a task that does not require us to overcome our limits but to bind ourselves to them.⁴

3 Castoriadis, (2007) *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*, Éditions Du Seuil, Paris, 2007, p. 153.

4 In recent scholarship Castoriadis's extensive engagement with art and aesthetics has been largely overlooked. For example, Jeff Klooger's exposition of Castoriadis's work in *Castoriadis: Psyche, society, autonomy* (2009) elucidates the central components of Castoriadis's corpus while making no reference to art or tragedy. In *Castoriadis' Ontology*, (2011), Suzi Adams identifies Castoriadis's ontological turn with only brief reference to his extensive lectures on the art and thought of ancient Greece. Further, in a recent edition of *Critical Horizons* (Vol. 13, No. 1, 2012) dedicated to exploring political imaginaries thought the work of Castoriadis, no reference was given to tragedy in order to clarify Castoriadis's project of autonomous society. While I do not suggest that the neglect of Castoriadis' work on art undermines these

In the first section of this paper I explore Castoriadis's understanding of the reciprocity between philosophy and tragedy, a move that leads him to figure philosophical thinking in terms of elucidation rather than construction. In the second section I try to show that his understanding of philosophy as elucidation builds from the priority of the image in Kant's notion of imagination. I suggest that Kant provides Castoriadis with a grammar to locate the ground of freedom in the groundlessness of the imagination's representational activity. Yet while the freedom Kant grants to the imagination assists Castoriadis to defend the project of autonomy, it raises the problem of voluntarism: if the imagination is not grounded in reason or sensation, does it not follow that the representations it creates are mere chaos, that there is no criteria to guide our action other than the (non-rational) desire of the will? Castoriadis's close reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* leads him to find a response to this problem by considering artistic representation, turning particularly to the Greek tragedies. In section three I will suggest that his reading of tragedy develops and matures his notion of autonomy to provide a compelling response to the problem of voluntarism.⁵ Yet while his reading of tragedy strengthens his notion of autonomy it also reveals a paradox at the very heart of his project, a paradox between cosmos and chaos, between the institutions that give birth to our thinking and the rupturing energies of the imagination. I will conclude by suggesting that while this paradox leaves Castoriadis as an incomplete thinker, his vision of philosophical thinking as the attempt to elucidate the antimonial ground of human life provides a seminal contribution to contemporary philosophy.

Thaumazein: The Beginning of Philosophy

While philosophy has traditionally viewed tragedy as a mode of presentation that threatens its constructive aims, Castoriadis argues that tragedy and philosophy are not antithetical. In his view, tragedy is only antithetical to a kind of philosophy that has overstepped its limit. It is better understood as a mode of presentation that confronts, recalibrates and energises philosophical thinking. This reading of tragedy builds from Aristotle, who saw tragedy as the self-recognition of error in an experience that throws us into pity (*eleos*) and

significant works, my argument is that his later engagement with artistic representation reveals his most compelling response to the charge of voluntarism levelled against him. See: Adams, S. (2011). *Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Klooger, J. (2009). *Castoriadis: Psyche, society, autonomy*. Boston: Brill.

5 Plato. (1987). Waterfield, R. (Trans). *Theaetetus*. 155d. London: Penguin Books.

terror (*phobos*), cleansing the disordered emotions that inhibit the life of virtue. For Aristotle, tragedy prepares us for the love of wisdom and the mature use of our practical judgment.

However, Castoriadis argues that even tragedy's most fierce opponent—Plato—can assist us to make the connection between tragedy and the beginning of philosophy. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates tells us that the proper foundation of philosophy is a sense of wonder (*thaumazein*).⁶ In contrast to Descartes who began his philosophical method by blocking off his senses ('I will close my eyes . . . avert my senses from their objects'), *thaumazein* discloses a mode of thought that begins from our activity of *seeing* (*theorein*), where a particular 'this' (a form of *idein*) throws us into an amazed stupor, into wonder.⁷ While philosophical wonder and tragic pity and terror are prompted by different events, one turning on an encounter with an object and the other with a sequence of events performed on stage, neither begin from the comprehension of a body of knowledge. Rather, both begin from an *experience*. Just as the tragic reversal leads to the recognition of error, the experience of *thaumazein* collapses our everyday knowledge in an event that thrusts us into an awareness of the incomplete nature of our understanding. In terms that anticipate Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750), a landmark text that calls for a kind of 'sensuous cognition' (aesthetics), such an experience turns on an encounter with the 'that', the excess that lies beyond the 'this', something that transcends our grasp and draws us into a position of awe.⁸ In other words, both tragic terror and philosophical *thaumazein* begin from seeing, and in particular, in a the glimpse of something that far exceeds our comprehension.

Yet for Castoriadis, Plato misunderstood the experience of *thaumazein*, which meant he misunderstood the relation between tragedy and philosophy. Plato held that the excess that we experience visually is really the intuition of the forms that transcend the world of appearance, that are free from the transience that is intrinsic to the corruptible world of sight. Yet given that *thaumazein* begins with sight, Plato has great difficulty explaining where these

6 Raymond Prier. (1989). *Thauma Idesthai: The phenomenology of sight and appearance in archaic Greek*. p. 85. USA: University Press of Florida.

7 For Baumgarten, sensuous cognition moves not from universal to particular but from sensation to concept. To describe this sensuous cognition Baumgarten reenergizes the ancient word 'aesthetics'. In his magnum opus, *Aesthetica*, he begins as follows: 'Aesthetics ([that is to say,] the theory of the liberal arts, the lesser theory of knowledge, the art of thinking beautifully, the art of reason by analogy) is the science of sensuous cognition.' Alexander Baumgarten. (1750). Williams, M. (Trans). *Aesthetica*. I.C. Kleyb. §1.

8 Castoriadis, *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*, p. 143.

forms reside and how we know them. Are they a kind of memory of divine form that precedes our natality? Are they the presence of the infinite that dwells within? Plato is forced to presume the existence of the forms as the best explanation of the experience of *thaumazein*, yet he has trouble explaining how they came into original being. When he attempts to explain the world's creation in the *Timaeus*, we find that this creation is not a creation but an imitation. The demiurge of the *Timaeus* looks to a paradigm, a model of a perfect world, and with the materials available to him (space and matter) he manufactures a world that is perfect insofar as it is possible.⁹ Yet whence this model? Plato's philosophy leads to a dangerous regress that threatens to tear the ground from underneath the world of forms.

Seeing that Aristotle saw a reciprocity between tragedy and philosophy, it is not surprising that he interpreted *thaumazein* differently to Plato. Aristotle did not subordinate the content of the senses to philosophical thinking but held thought and sensation to be intrinsically connected. In the *Metaphysics* he begins in similar terms to Plato, suggesting that it is due to *thaumazein* that humans 'both now begin and at first began to philosophize.'¹⁰ Yet for Aristotle, *thaumazein* does not lead our attention beyond what we see. Rather, it gives us the intuition that there is knowledge beyond what we *yet* know. In particular, it draws us to reinvest in the world of appearances, to 'pursue *technē* [art/science] in order to know.'¹¹ In Aristotle's understanding, this desire for knowledge premises the very possibility of human freedom. We are not determined by our sensory experience, for in *thaumazein* we discover the need to go beyond our senses. Yet neither are we determined by the categories of reason, for we must reinvest in the world of sight in order to discover what the categories are. For Aristotle, by throwing us onto our creative resources in order to know, *thaumazein* reveals our fundamental freedom: *technē* reveals that humans are 'free for [themselves] and not for another.'¹² For Aristotle, *technē*, our creative response to *thaumazein*, is the mode of being whereby humanity exists 'for itself'. *Thaumazein* is the beginning of philosophy for it throws us from habitual patterns of behaviour to the cultivation of our possibilities.

Drawing from this conversation, Castoriadis argues that *thaumazein* turns on an encounter with the 'other thing' (*l'autre chose*) that escapes our understanding:

9 Aristotle. (1984). *The Complete Works*. 982b12–13 vol. II, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

10 Aristotle. (1984). *The Complete Works*. 982b12.

11 Aristotle. (1984). *The Complete Works*. 982b25.

12 Aristotle. (1984). *The Complete Works*. 982b26–27.

when we are stilled before the amazing, miraculous thing there is what in German we call *Wunder* and in ancient Greek *thaumazein*. Such an experience attracts far more than surprised admiration but *gets you out of the state you are in*, for it contains not only an emotional but a cognitive dimension in which one wants to know.¹³

In our everyday mode of experience we lack the desire to know because the world is exhausted with meaning. The possibility of being in need of knowledge is *unthinkable*, meaning that it would take something more powerful than mere surprise and admiration to get us out of the state we are in. *Thaumazein* provides Castoriadis with a way to explain the experience in which our imaginative closure is pried open with a force that overwhelms us, throwing us into uncertainty and the cognitive awareness of our lack. In the experience of the 'other thing' we are confronted with the limits to our cognitive grasp of the world and become aware of the possibility of new ways of making sense of things. We are, according to Castoriadis, dehabituated from an unreflected mode of being and given a restless 'desire to know'.¹⁴

If philosophy begins from this desire to know and if the desire to know comes from *thaumazein*, then it follows that philosophical thinking is premised on the terrifying experience of finding ourselves to be in error and without ground to stand on.¹⁵ In this formulation affect and cognition converge into a holistic account of philosophy at the nexus of body and mind. Like Plato and Aristotle, Castoriadis views *thaumazein* not as the end of philosophy but as its beginning. In similar terms to Heidegger's assessment of wonder, while

13 Castoriadis. *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*, p. 156 (emphasis mine).

14 Castoriadis, *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*.

15 Here we find echoes of Kant's sublime in Castoriadis reading of *thaumazein*. However, unlike Kant Castoriadis does not provide a rationalist response to *thaumazein*. In Kant's terms, the sublime 'is the name given to what is *absolutely great*.' What is absolutely great is that which causes us to consider all things as small when they are drawn into comparison. Yet in Kant's framework, no mere thing, no object of nature, can have this characteristic. The absolutely great is not found outside of us but refers to what is *inside*: the ideas of reason. The 'beyond' is not to be discovered in the world but dwells already in the mind. Thus Plato and Kant share a common skepticism of the faculty of sight, holding a version of rationalism to explain the experience of excess, the beyond, albeit in the mind or in the heavens. In Kant's sublime, the harmony of aesthetic judgment is only *momentarily* disrupted, meaning, given cognition's desire for unity, that we experience the feeling of displeasure and a longing to be restored with beautiful form. See Kant. (2000). Guyer, P. (Trans). *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 5:248. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

thaumazein opens our eyes wide it simultaneously plunges us into darkness.¹⁶ It unveils the fact that our grasp of the world—our ability to build concepts that determine the being of beings—is not immediate and complete, but interpretive and fallible, dwarfed in comparison to the excess that shines through the crack opened by *thaumazein*.¹⁷ Thus *thaumazein* de-centres us; it draws us out of ourselves by shedding light onto what we have occluded with our inherited mode of seeing. It does not lead to the task of constructing a philosophical system that could guarantee the truth of its results, but to the task of *elucidation*.¹⁸ Elucidation is the task of illuminating the world from a starting point that recognises that we hold only a partial take on reality. It seeks to unveil the things we experience from underneath the cover of our immediate perspective, shedding light on the excess that lies outside. Understood in these terms, philosophy, for Castoriadis, begins with gaining the knowledge of what we do not know, with discovering the limits of our knowledge. It disorients us from familiar patterns of understanding and reorients us toward *techné*—science or art—in order to know.

Kant, Imagination and Art

By couching philosophy in the reorienting power of experience rather than reason or perception, Castoriadis attempts to navigate between the poles of rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism implies that our particular sensory

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- 16 In his infamous Rector's Address, Heidegger describes *thaumazein* as 'the initial wondering perseverance in the face of what is', creating the *arche* of genuine science. Yet to be alerted to the task of science means to find oneself in the dark, in ignorance. Heidegger, Martin. (March, 1985). 'The Self-Assertion of the German University and The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts', *Review of Metaphysics*. 38:3. p. 480 ff.
 - 17 The German infinitive 'to conceptualize' or 'to comprehend', *begreifen*, is derived from *greifen*, 'to grasp'. Like Heidegger, Castoriadis holds that the active, concept-building role of the imagination conceals at the very same moment that it unconceals, providing a false sense of totality. See Castoriadis, C. (1997). Curtis, D.A. (Trans and Ed.). *The Castoriadis Reader*. pp. 319–337. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, and Heidegger. (1997). Taft, R. (Trans). *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
 - 18 While Castoriadis draws significantly from Kant, his understanding of philosophy as elucidation confronts Kant's notion of the system as the ideal of science. In the first *Critique* Kant argues that the ideal of science, an *a priori* idea of reason, requires that our 'cognitions cannot at all constitute a rhapsody but must constitute a system, which alone can support and advance its essential ends.' A system that constructs a rational edifice can, in Kant's mind, guarantee the truth of its results. For Castoriadis, the system merely covers over the uncertainty of the results of thinking. Kant. (1988). Guyer, P. (Trans). *Critique of Pure Reason*. A831, B860. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

experience is deficient to the universal ideas of reason, meaning that philosophy's task is to proceed from reason alone. Yet rationalism removes the creative component of discovery that Aristotle used to demonstrate human freedom, meaning that thought is determined by reason: it is not free (i.e. not 'for itself'). Yet if we reject rationalism and begin with experience, with sense impressions, it follows that thought is determined by the impressions given to it by the senses. Empiricism entails that humans are mere creatures of cause and effect, meaning that it is not reason but sensory intuitions that determine the ideas in the mind. To elucidate a path of freedom between rationalism and empiricism Castoriadis turns to Kant's representational account of cognition, finding in Kant's third *Critique* a grammar to articulate the mind's break with sensation and the fundamental freedom of imagination.

Castoriadis's philosophical development can be read as a sustained reflection on Kant's third *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgment*. In the first *Critique*, Kant explored the imagination (*Einbildung*) as the faculty that provides the ground for our experience.¹⁹ In particular, the imagination provides a refutation of Hume's empiricism by opening a conceptual path to suggest that the ideas in the mind are not *a posteriori* sense impressions. If our ideas were merely the impressions left on the mind by sensation then the mind would be a mere machine in a universe of cause and effect, meaning that the freedom we feel in the moral sphere would be an illusion. For Kant, however, the imagination produces images (*Bilde*) of perceived objects by spontaneously uniting sense data and *a priori* concepts, meaning that the mind is not the impression of the sensory world but an active power that freely gives itself the view that it receives. The key to Kant's imagination is spontaneity, which entails that the resulting image cannot be traced causally; it is not the result of a mechanism, for it is an absolutely new and unique presentation.

However, while Kant's imagination refutes the threat to freedom posed by empiricism, it raises the opposite threat to freedom: rationalism. If the imagination is limited to the conceptual faculty of the understanding then it merely plays with the sense data given to it by intuition. In other words, while it is not determined by sense impressions it is determined by its nature, by the rational concepts that frame experience. This problem led to Kant's third *Critique* where he identifies a reflective capacity of the imagination to make what is

19 *Einbildung* comes from the verb *bilden*, meaning to shape, form or educate. While the reproductive imagination forms images (*Bilde*) of perceived objects, the productive imagination does two things: it unites sensibility and understanding, thus making experience possible, and it transforms the material of nature into works of art. Inwood, M. (1992). *A Hegel Dictionary*. p. 187. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

without form or schema an object for reflection. In such a mode of thinking the imagination operates *without* the conceptual faculty of the understanding. In Kant's terms, the ability of the productive imagination to judge without the aid of the understanding means that it can 'create', and, by implication (recall Aristotle), that it is 'free'.²⁰ Like Aristotle, Kant recognised the link between *techne* and freedom in his separation of the understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*), suggesting that the failure of the understanding (the sublime) is the very beginning of human freedom for it alerts us to the task of knowing that is not determined by the immediacy of sensory intuition or rational ideas but depends on the creativity of imagination. Humans are not just form users but form makers, shaping concepts to synthesize the polymorphic and disparate things they experience, thereby bringing order to chaos.

Castoriadis saw that Kant's notion of reflective judgment provides the key to understanding the creativity of imagination, for it involves a mode of aesthetic judgment that explains the imagination's ability to both create sets and use these sets to make sense of its experience. To argue that imagination can operate without the aid of concepts Kant splits judgement into two, describing the judgment of the first *Critique* as 'determinative judgment' and identifying a second, new form of judgment as 'reflective judgment'. Determinative judgment unites image with concept, meaning that it is limited to the concepts it possesses. Reflective judgment, on the other hand, is a kind of aesthetic judgment that can go beyond the limits of our knowledge: it can discover and create. Kant already unhooked the imagination from being determined by sense impressions for it is spontaneously productive. Now we find that because reflective judgment can operate without the concepts of reason it is no longer limited to nature.

The second kind of judgment Kant identifies has significant implications for his understanding of imagination, for it introduces a social element wherein the aesthetic creations of reflective judgment are shared amongst a community. The verb *bilden*, the heart of *Einbildung*, does not simply mean 'to shape' or 'to form' but also has the meaning of education or self-formation, as in *Bildung*. The *Einbildung* is the self-institution of one's culture, what Aristotle calls our 'second nature' and Kant 'another nature'; a nature produced 'out of' the material that is given to it yet goes beyond that material.²¹ The imagination is thus

20 Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 5:314.

21 Aristotle says that 'the virtues come about in us neither by nature nor apart from nature' (Aristotle, *The Complete Works*, vol. II, 1103a 24–5). Virtue is a kind of 'second nature' for it does not develop first but is learned through education and discipline. For Kant, human civilization is testament to the creative ability of the imagination that is able to produce

a self-instituting power, positing rules of its own from the example given by others. Kant reveals that a community is not simply governed by the universal duties of the categorical imperative but through laws and rules that are particular to its own practice. The categorical imperative results in public action that gives law to others: 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction.'²² Actions become exemplary or law-giving leading to the rational ordering of society. In much the same way, the ideas created by reflective judgment are exemplary in that they give rule or law to others, laws that become guides for cognition. Yet unlike the laws issued by the categorical imperative, aesthetic ideas do not give laws that are 'without contradiction': they are not rational and are thus liable to being proved false or only partially complete. Thus we find the aesthetic domain of Kant's reflective judgment to be a pseudo-political domain where self-created laws are shared amongst a particular community. However, if reflective judgment does not possess the rational basis of the categorical imperative, does it entail that the aesthetic sphere is mere chaos, providing rules that are at the mercy of the lawlessness of imagination? In other words, can their validity be assessed if they are disconnected from reason?

Kant's answer is that reflective judgment is lawfully lawless: it operates without concepts (it is lawless, free) yet in a mode that is *analogous* to reason (it is lawful). Because reflective judgment searches for laws and concepts of its own Kant argues that we have 'cause to presume, by analogy, that it too should contain in itself *a priori*, if not exactly its own legislation, then still a proper principle of its own for seeking laws, although a merely subjective one.'²³ Kant posits that reflective judgment is analogous to reason for he began to see the menace posed by the absence of a foundation in the aesthetic sphere. Yet he could not 'ground' reflective judgment in the ontological realm of determinative judgment, for that would return us to the problem of rationalism. Instead he argues that we have good reason to presume the existence of an 'original ground', the supersensible (*das Übersinnliche*), that 'ought' to exist if our cognition is to be coherent.²⁴ The supersensible is the original, common ground

its own 'nature' that far exceeds the material given to it and its own basic needs of survival (i.e. its 'first nature'). In his terms, 'The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it.' Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:314.

22 Kant. (1993). Ellington, J. (Trans). (3rd ed.). *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. p. 30 Indianapolis: Hackett.

23 Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:177.

24 See Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:175–176.

between reflective and determinative judgment that ensures their analogous relation. The analogous relation of reason and reflective judgment, to wit, that they both search for laws, reveals that the creations of the imagination are not determined to be chaotic or senseless. They are neither accidental nor the mere construction of the will. Imaginary representations are ordered and yet free, for reflective judgment acts in a mode that is analogous to reason by creating *aesthetic ideas*. The aesthetic idea is a:

representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is un-nameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language.²⁵

Reflective judgment creates aesthetic ideas in the search for form in the midst of chaos, generating ideas that are indeterminate, inexhaustible, illuminating the un-nameable and animating the cognitive faculties to express themselves in literature and art. Each idea gives a rule to judgment, meaning that each new aesthetic idea can operate according to the rules given by previous ideas. But because aesthetic ideas are only analogous to reason they are subjective, meaning that they can be proved to be incorrect or incomplete by a new presentation. Thus each new idea can also destroy a previous idea, meaning that the aesthetic is a realm of creation and destruction, of the establishment of form that is liable to de-creation. Reflective judgment is a faculty of the imagination that moves from sensuous particular to universal in order to make present what resists presentation, and the only criteria it has to use are the aesthetic ideas it has inherited, ideas that are prone to destruction within the chaotic realm of historical creativity.

What Castoriadis found to be of particular importance in the third *Critique* is that Kant highlights the significance of community in shaping our cognitive practices. For Kant, the community is the domain in which aesthetic ideas (our second nature, our *Bildung*) are shared, contested and transformed. Kant's creative imagination, now bolstered with the faculty of reflective judgment, enables Castoriadis to construe society as a collection of institutions that schematise cognition by generating aesthetic ideas that orientate a society to the world in a shared manner:

²⁵ Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:316.

The institution of society is the institution of social imaginary significations. In principle, this institution has to confer meaning on everything that might present itself, 'in' society as well as 'outside' it. Social imaginary signification brings into being things as *these here* things, posits them as being *what* they are—the *what* being posited here by signification, which is indissociably principle of existence, principle of thought, principle of value, principle of action.²⁶

Kant provides a grammar for Castoriadis to reject the notion of the mind as the impression of society on the subject, for society is *self-instituted* by the productive imagination. The social institutions—the aesthetically crafted ideas—confer meaning on everything as the imagination unites intuition with concept, giving it the view it receives.

Yet Castoriadis argues that Kant's attempt to hold onto the ideas of reason by splitting judgment into two spheres (determinative and reflective) occludes the ontological significance of the imagination. In Castoriadis' view, Kant's third *Critique* is monumentally important to philosophical history for it unhooks cognition from the categorical determinations of the mind that connects (or limits) reason to the Cosmos, the original and timeless form of the world. In other words, Kant reveals that human creativity has ontological significance, for it holds the capacity to form ideas that are not subordinate to Cosmos but that *constitute* the Cosmos. However, despite this radical suggestion Kant maintained that the imagination remains inferior to the ontological realm of being, that the chaotic movement of imagination is always subordinate to Cosmos. Even in the third *Critique* Kant maintains that the infinite is always noumena, beyond our cognition, forever condemning the imagination to finitude by holding aesthetic ideas to be merely analogous to ontological reality.

Castoriadis argues that if the imagination has the primacy that Kant, at times, ascribes to it, then the ontological realm of noumena cannot be other than a representation of imagination.²⁷ Thus the imagination is fundamen-

26 Castoriadis, C. (1997b). Curtis, D. (Trans). *World in Fragments*. p. 313, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

27 For example, see Kant's notion of an intuitive intellect in §76–77 of the third *Critique*. While Kant maintained that the intuitive intellect is merely a 'regulative principle for ourselves' to show the limits of cognition, many of his early readers, such as Schelling and Hegel, believed that he provides a way to overcome the limits of his discursive intellect with a constructive notion of imagination as that which brings the absolute into being, i.e. a vision of the imagination as ontological. Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. 5:404.

tally creative, constructing the entire world it experiences including the logical basis that determines what is real, coherent and possible. To free the ontological imagination from the regulative limits Kant placed upon it Castoriadis modifies 'productive imagination' as the '*radical* imagination'. The imagination is 'radical' (from the roots) because it creates:²⁸

The term *radical* I use . . . to emphasise the idea that this imagination is before the distinction between 'real' and 'fictitious'. To put it bluntly: it is because radical imagination exists that 'reality' exists *for us* . . . it is radical because it creates.²⁹

Kant maintained that aesthetic ideas are merely regulative and that only the ideas of reason are constructive of our experience. Castoriadis' radical imagination collapses the two modes of judgment into one, holding that the aesthetic creations of imagination do not simply *regulate* the ideas of reason but *constitute* reality for us.³⁰ If the imagination has the ontological primacy of creativity, then determinative judgment along with the noumenal realm can

28 Castoriadis' notion of the radical imagination confronts the Freudian and Heideggerian imagination. For both Freud and Heidegger the imagination 'brings-forth' (*poiesis*) representations, 'producing' or drawing into presence what was already there. For Castoriadis, the imagination creates *ex nihilo*, linking it closely with *poiesis* but with an essential distinction. He models the imagination's creativity not on the Greek artificer who gives determinate form to the pre-existing materials of the world—who 'brings-forth'—but on the creativity of the Hebrew God who creates the world from nothing. Thus the very structures, meanings and ideas in the imagination are created by each imagination in every case. Castoriadis, C. (1978). K. & Ryle, M. (Trans). *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. p. 83. Soper, Great Britain: Harvester Press.

29 Castoriadis. *The Castoriadis Reader*, p. 321.

30 While Castoriadis is unable to move beyond a left-Hegelian reading of Hegel as metaphysical artificer, his construction of Kantian imagination as constitutive of 'reality' and 'reason' has clear resonances with Hegel's philosophy. What he draws from Hegel is the expansive conception of experience afforded by his reading of Kant's imagination. In *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos* (p. 151) Castoriadis quotes Hegel's Jena Lectures Hegel to elucidate that that representation exceeds what is given, that, according to Hegel, our 'night' without consciousness (*bewusstlos*) contains a multitude of representations before social form enters into the daylight of reality: 'The human being is this Night, this empty nothing which contains everything in its simplicity—a wealth of infinitely many representations, images, none of which occur to it directly, and none of which are not present.' Hegel, in Rauch, L. (1983). *Hegel and the Human Spirit: a translation of the Jena lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805–6) with commentary*. p. 87. Michigan: Wayne State University Press.

be only a postulate of the imagination. Thus the ideas of reason are mere postulates, meaning that reflective judgment does not operate in a mode that is analogous to reason but that it *is* reason. For Castoriadis there is no analogy for there are not two spheres of judgment. There is simply one sphere of being: the ontological sphere of human creativity. Every individual imagination posits a unique ontological vantage on the world that constitutes reality, and there is no shared *a priori* ideas of reason available for judgment but simply the shared desire to bring order to chaos.

Yet if there are no *a priori* concepts available to fill the courtroom of reason, then imagination finds itself without ground.³¹ In Castoriadis's words, "The labour of signification is . . . perpetually menaced . . . by the absence of any keystone for this edifice and by the sand that lies in place of what ought to have supported it at its foundation".³²

For Castoriadis, we have no reason to presume the existence of a ground. The primacy of imagination reveals that the so-called *a priori* unconditioned ideals of reason can only be the postulates of imagination itself. Reason is not the faculty of the unconditioned but appears to us as the ultimate 'ensemblistic' faculty, combining and 'ensembling' the totality of one's experience in a form of logic it derives from experience.³³ Castoriadis's notion of reason as an 'ensemblistic' faculty provides a critique of philosophy's tendency to fix our concepts as absolute ideas of reason, exploring reason as the *vis formundi*, the magmatic energy that creates sets and organises its sensory material. He thus shifts Kant's 'unconditioned' from the being of reason to the spontaneous ensemblistic energies of the imagination, an unconditioned flux that creates ever-new constellations of meaning and constantly erodes 'what ought to have supported it at its foundation.' The 'ought' of Kant's supersensible is revealed for what it is: a spurious projection of the imagination that desires its ideas

31 For Kant, in the experience of modernity our judgment becomes aware of its task 'to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all its groundless pretensions, and this not by mere decrees by according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws; and this court is none other than the critique of pure reason itself.' The tragedies also put our ideas in court, but without the guarantee of reason. In the place of reason we have the collective exercise of judgment. Immanuel Kant, Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A xi–xii.

32 Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, p. 313.

33 In the *Imaginary Institution of Society* Castoriadis coins the word 'enselblistic' to signify the act of 'creating sets' and 'ensembles' out of something pre-existent and undifferentiated. This kind of undifferentiated reality out of which the ensemblist logic creates sets, classes, objects and properties, is, roughly, what he calls *magma*. See Castoriadis, C. (1987). Blamey, K. (Trans). *Imaginary Institution of Society*. p. 343. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

to be fixed in the very fabric of Cosmos. Thus when Cosmos fails, so does the whole critical edifice with it. We are thrown from our stable foundation and are ready to begin afresh, to pursue *techné* in order to know.

However, Castoriadis' rejection of the unconditionality of reason has caused many critics to charge him guilty of voluntarism.³⁴ By unhooking the ground of reason from Cosmos and refusing to accept that nature can give any meaningful ideas, the imagination is free from the problems of rationalism and empiricism but seems to be so radically indeterminate that it is mere chaos. The only law imagination has is its own: its will. Kant's refusal to reject the ideas of reason might obscure the ontological significance of creativity, but his attempt to maintain a distinction between the two spheres of judgment was intended to maintain an ontological ground to his project. Thus while rationalism might lead to one kind of determinism, the absence of an unconditioned faculty leads to another, for if reflective judgment does not act analogously to an unconditioned ideal then we seem to be fated to the lawlessness of imagination.

Castoriadis cleaves a passage from this theoretical cul-de-sac by turning to Kant's notion of the artistic, aesthetic realm of human creativity. Kant's aesthetic sphere answers the question of how we are to understand the development of nature in conjunction with the moral destiny of humanity. In other words, it aims to solve the problem of how we can be both free by nature (on the level of spontaneous imagination) and yet on the path to freedom (realising that freedom in the practical sphere in the cultivation of *Bildung*). Kant's notion of the aesthetic sphere answers this question because it shows how aesthetic ideas orientate us toward our fundamental freedom by exciting the imagination to think beyond nature, to see that the inherited institutions are merely aesthetic ideas that can be modified, improved, transformed. Aesthetic ideas are thus pivotal to the project of autonomy for they dethrone inherited knowledge and empower us to 'dare to know', animating the cognitive faculties to express themselves in literature and art.³⁵ Thus artistic representation

34 The most significant critique of Castoriadis is that the radical imagination collapses his philosophical project into a version of voluntarism: that thought is reduced to the will which randomly posits whatever it wants. For example, Callinicos argues that Castoriadis is forced to initiate voluntarism as a means to save the revolutionary possibilities of Marxism. This is, I argue, an impoverished reading of Castoriadis that I hope to correct by reading his work in light of Kant's third *Critique*. Reading his work in this way shows that the imagination is not simply lawless but lawful. See Callinicos, A. (1990). *Trotskyism*. Chapter 1. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. See also Heller and Fehér. (1991). *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism*. London: Transaction Publishers.

35 In Kant's famous tract 'What is Enlightenment' he promotes the enlightenment project of autonomy, stating that 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred

orientates us toward our freedom, and poetry, for Kant, is the most powerful form of art in this regard:

The art of poetry claims the highest rank of all. It expands the mind by setting the imagination free and presenting . . . the one that connects its presentation with a fullness of thought to which no linguistic expression is fully adequate, and thus elevates itself aesthetically to the level of ideas.³⁶

Kant argues that poetry sets the imagination free from the limits of sense data and the ideas of reason, alerting us to an aesthetic sphere where ideas are created and destroyed in a kind of art history. In Kant's words, 'it is really the art of poetry in which the faculty of aesthetic ideas can reveal itself in its full measure', for

The poet ventures to make sensible . . . that of which there are examples in experience, e.g., death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc., sensible beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature, by means of an imagination that emulates the precedent of reason in attaining to a maximum.³⁷

Poetry, in Kant's mind, reveals a mode of judgment that makes sensible what we find in experience but remains enigmatic, going beyond experience in order to draw out the significance of what we encounter. Thus the ideas produced by poets are not concepts but symbols: indirect, figurative presentations of concepts that are not determinate but that 'strain toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience . . . because no concept can be fully adequate to them, as inner intuitions.'³⁸ Poetic symbols do not instruct but empower the reader to think beyond the ideas of the text and the established sphere of significations it confronts. Moreover, poetic symbols give rules, they schematize our thinking in a way that orientates us to the world in terms of our creativity:

immaturity. . . "Have the courage to use your own understanding," [dare to know!] is therefore the motto of the enlightenment.' This text was written only three years after his third *Critique*. Kant. (1991). Nisbet, H. (Trans). *Kant: Political Writings*, p. 54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

36 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:326.

37 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:314.

38 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:314.

"The product of a genius . . . is an example . . . for emulation by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary".³⁹

The works of the imagination are uniquely exemplary. They 'remodel experience', giving 'the imagination an impetus to think more . . . than can be comprehended in a concept'.⁴⁰ In other words, art has a philosophically important task: it refines the capacities of our reflective judgment and reveals the chaos of the aesthetic sphere not as something to be feared but as the very ground of creativity. Yet it does not cause us to reject established form for it reveals the importance of tradition and inherited laws. Without an exemplary context of other artworks a new work would be unintelligible and there would be no impetus to 'think more', nothing to set the imagination free. Art opens a historical space that results in a critical confrontation with tradition, alerting us to both our need for tradition, that is, for the rules given by aesthetic ideas, but also for our need to confront tradition, to call the imaginary institutions that give rule to cognition into question and to thereby transform them. Art is thus the ultimate domain of self-reflection, providing a tradition that orientates us toward the exercise of reflective judgment that confronts and transforms tradition. It is, paradoxically, the tradition of freedom.

Kant's notion of the aesthetic sphere provides a grammar for Castoriadis to articulate the reality that there is more than the chaos of freedom at every moment, that the desire of the will is not the basic principle of the social world. Rather, the realization of our freedom is a tradition, a continued attempt to think more than can be comprehended in a concept and to set the imagination free. Artistic representation enlarges our reflective judgment, and the aesthetic sphere of art history orientates society toward a critical engagement with its tradition, revealing that the aesthetic sphere is groundless and thus open to modification and transformation.

However, if Castoriadis is right in arguing that the aesthetic sphere is not simply a subordinate realm to ontological reality but the one realm of being, then the transgressive, reorienting work of art will not just rupture cultural history but also *cognitive* history. Aesthetic ideas do not simply free the imagination to create ideas that regulate how it makes sense of the world, but ideas that give criteria for how it will act and judge. Without the protection of the ontological realm of determinative judgment to provide an analogy for aesthetic judgment, without the supersensible ground of the critical system, the

39 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:318.

40 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:315.

aesthetic sphere is not fixed on an ever-increasing spiral to its moral destiny but finds itself in a chaos that extends to ontological reality and is thus radically dependent on its own ideas. Our moral destiny can go backwards and has no guarantee of success, and the only lifeline consists in the ideas of our own making. The ability of aesthetic ideas to orientate us toward freedom becomes the only path to cleave open imaginative freedom.

Through considering Kant's notion of art history, Castoriadis' philosophical project turned to the vital role of artistic representation to rupture our inherited aesthetic ideas and to orientate us toward the freedom of the imagination. The power of art to situate us before the groundless realm of historical creativity, to free the imagination to think with and beyond the concepts it possesses, becomes the very task of philosophy. The project of autonomy is thus a collective task of maintaining the tradition of freedom, maintaining the legacy of creativity that frees the imagination through the constant creation of aesthetic ideas. And the artworks that are most powerful in alerting us to this task, for Castoriadis, are the Greek tragedies.

Tragedy: Representing the Paradoxical Reality of Human Being

In the third *Critique*, Kant observes that 'the presentation of the sublime, so far as it belongs to beautiful art, can be united with beauty in a verse tragedy.'⁴¹ This is a fascinating observation that remains undeveloped in his work, sparking the interest of his successors who attempted to draw the beautiful and the sublime together in a reading of tragedy as destruction and reformation. For Kant, tragedy can be sublime in that it is overwhelming, throwing us from certainty to fear. Yet as a work of art tragedy gives a new rule, establishing a new aesthetic idea that situates the spectators in a critical relation to their tradition while recognising that the tradition was necessary for it to come into being. Tragedy is thus epochal, destroying a form of understanding and replacing it with another. The question that remains after Kant is what exactly is destroyed in tragic presentation, and what new rule is given in its stead.

Castoriadis suggests a provocative answer. In his view there is no tragic essence or idea but a public institution that emerged within the heart of fifth-century Athenian culture that orientated its spectators toward a new understanding of judgment and wisdom. The tragic institution orientated the spectators to 'think more ... than can be comprehended' in their inherited concepts, to see that the current form of society is not determined by the

41 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:325.

Cosmos and to creatively search for new possibilities. In other words, tragedy marks the initial moment when the aesthetic sphere was uncovered and its spectators were ruptured from tradition and orientated toward their creativity. For Castoriadis, when we read the tragedies two and a half thousand years after their original performance we are confronted with the moment wherein a society ceased to understand itself in terms of the determinative source of nature (*physis*) and undertook the collective interrogation of its shared meanings in the thematic of self-creation (*nomos*).

The tragedies destroy the idea of Cosmos as the fundamental nature of the world that provides the ground for morality, knowledge and validity. From the view of Cosmos, reason is an objective power for it turns on our participation in the Being of the world, meaning that chaos must be tamed and banished by reason. From the tragic view, however, chaos is not a force that threatens to encroach upon ordered society from the outside. Rather, chaos is transformed into the creative energy at the foundation of the social order itself: “at the ‘roots’ of the world, beyond the familiar landscape, chaos always reigns supreme. The order of the world [nature] has no ‘meaning’ for man: it posits the blind necessity of genesis and birth, on one hand, of corruption and catastrophe—death of the forms—on the other.”⁴²

Castoriadis argues that what the tragedies present for all to see is that ‘Being is Chaos’, revealing that nature can provide no meaning for us and alerting us to the created nature of institutions.⁴³ In short, they alert us to the task of self-creation. If at the foundation of the world we find not order but a disruptive, creative energy, then reason cannot access timeless truth or guarantee the results of our thought or action. Rather, reason is a fragile faculty that is liable to error. It is a *human* faculty, capable of discovery, learning, creation and experience.

Yet how can the tragedies present the chaos of being? For Castoriadis, the tragedies act as “a window into the abyss, into chaos, and the shaping of this abyss—it is the moment of sense, the creation of a cosmos by art itself.”⁴⁴

What distinguishes the luminosity of the tragedies from just any kind of art is that they present the abyss without idolatry: they are ‘transparent’.⁴⁵ The tragedies, like other well-formed artworks, are not phenomenal but transparent for they unveil the chaos from which all phenomena emerge. They confront the audience with chaos by giving the abyssal ground of reality a kind of form.

42 Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*, p. 273.

43 Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*, p. 284.

44 Castoriadis, *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*, p. 153. My translation.

45 Castoriadis, *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*, p. 153. My translation.

Yet the tragedies are not transcultural texts that give an abstract presentation of 'chaos' as an idea, but must be read in their context as unveiling a particular form of idolatry that represented chaos as something determinate. The tragedies reveal the chaos that lies beneath a particular *notion of validity* that lay deep in the Athenian imagination by presenting traditional realities in a new form. This novel form of art that came to be called 'tragedy' provides a significant imaginative shift. Instead of presenting the narration of events by a lone Chorus, tragedy presents the judgments and decisions made by the heroes of the traditional myths, judgments that are shown to determine the course of the events. The spectators observe the heroes act and choose, and are confronted with self-certain characters who believe that their action is guaranteed by the gods, by the very fabric of the Cosmos. Yet when two heroes hold antimonic convictions, both equally justified by the gods or by nature, they proceed to destroy each other by those very convictions. The destruction leads the heroes to recognise that they had acted out of a self-deceived error of judgment: that what they thought to be a stable ground was in fact chaos. Their path of action proves not to be the outworking of necessity but the result of a choice.

By representing ancient myths in tragic rather than epic form, tragedy orients the spectators toward their tradition in a new way. The authority of the lone Chorus is displaced for the antimonic confrontation of opposing characters, and the Chorus become merely one voice among many—the voice of tradition—rather than providing a final interpretation of the events. The tragic form refuses to give an interpretation of the action but instead presents the judgments made by each character and the reasoning upon which those judgments are made. The spectators see the inconclusive character of the reasoning upon which the heroes base their decisions and make claims to legitimacy, becoming the jury faced with the most monstrous of crimes. Their entire cultural history is cleaved open and revealed to be the outworking of individual and fallible choices, many of which were highly dubious.

For example, Homer's presentation of the battle of Troy in the *Odyssey* is reconsidered by Aeschylus' three hundred years later in a manner that calls the entire myth into question. In the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon is forced to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia so that the winds would give a favourable passage for his army on their journey to the battle of Troy. He returns from Troy as the triumphant conqueror only to be killed by Aegisthus, who has taken Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra as his lover.⁴⁶ While the death of the heroic king after a long and victorious voyage is indeed unfortunate, Agamemnon's death is not tragic.

46 See Homer. (2003). D. Rieu, D. (Revised & Trans). *The Odyssey*. 11.409–11. London: Penguin Books.

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, however, Agamemnon meets a different fate. He returns from Troy claiming that his heroic victory was not simply his own but the act of divine vengeance.⁴⁷ While he is busy heralding his shared triumph with the gods whose supposed 'protecting power / Sent forth, and brought me home again,' Clytemnestra awaits him.⁴⁸ She plays the role of the affectionate wife, laying out a purple carpet to honour his victory. Yet the carpet is not the victor's path but a funeral procession. Clytemnestra holds Agamemnon responsible for murdering their daughter and brutally kills him when he reaches their home. The Chorus hold Clytemnestra guilty of a grievous crime and swiftly call for retribution, causing Clytemnestra to respond by claiming that her action was justified by Apollo who helped her to see that 'The guile I used to kill him / He used himself at first.'⁴⁹ However, the Chorus also hold Agamemnon guilty, for he sacrificed Iphigenia because he valued his glory and his war over the demands of his family. They recognise that his sacrifice was not necessitated by the gods but was to 'keep morale from sagging / in superstitious soldiers.'⁵⁰ It was a sin, an error (*harmartia*) that violated the 'awe that parenthood must claim' and resulted in his own death.⁵¹ We discover that the battle of Troy was not the vengeance of the gods but the outworking of Agamemnon's ego.

While the Chorus show that error lies with both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, they prove unable to decide on a right course of action in response. The situation is too complex, too fraught with contradictions for the old voice of tradition to prove capable of a response. The spectators are orientated to critically assess the reasoning that each character gives for their actions, but they cannot make sense of the situation with their predetermined ideas of justice. They must balance the competing elements and search for a new path and recognise the limits therein.

For Castoriadis, when we understand the tragedies in their historical context we find that they turn on the collective realization of error and responsibility, orientating the spectators toward a new foundation of validity. The tragic poets lived in a time of transition, where new institutions were emerging within traditional religious practices. They were ruptured, thrown, and saw the

47 When Agamemnon returns he addresses his countrymen: 'First, Argos, and her native gods, revive from me / The conqueror's greeting on my safe return; for which, / As for the just revenge I wrought on Priam's Troy, / Heaven shares my glory.' Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ll. 810–813.

48 Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ll. 852–3.

49 Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ll. 1524–5.

50 Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ll. 806–7.

51 Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ll. 226, 133.

need for new ways of making sense of human action. They created artworks that are exemplary, prying open an old foundation of validity and revealing it to be inadequate to deal with experience, throwing the spectators onto their own devices. They are alerted to the inescapable (tragic) reality of judgment: that nothing can guarantee the correctness of action, neither divine law nor reason.

This reversal-recognition structure, the process of being destabilised, thrown, and then coming to a new understanding, signals a new relation to self-understanding in the Athenian imagination based on experience and reflection. Tradition is displaced from its position of authority and the task of learning from experience replaces it. Yet tragic self-reflection is not simply the rejection of tradition for a new form of inquiry. Rather, the tragedies *transform* tradition, establishing a new, critical relation toward tradition where new tools are drawn from a traditional gamut of references. It is not through the rejection of tradition but through the critical confrontation with tradition that the imagination is freed to think more than the concepts it inherits.

Like many philosophers who turn to Greek tragedy, Castoriadis finds the greatest example of Aristotle's reversal-recognition structure in the tragedies of Sophocles, and in *Antigone* in particular.⁵² He writes against Hegel who argued that Antigone and Creon represent the natural value of the family (*physis*) and the self-created value of the state (*nomos*) that come into conflict in ethical life. For Hegel, Antigone and Creon enact their ethical commitments, thereby bringing each right into material being. When each commitment is held to be absolute, right collides with right and each is shown to be one-sided. The spectators observe the mutual justification of both values and find themselves faced with a tragic world where we can be both right and wrong, and where right and right can contradict each other. Yet this collision is not the final say in the matter for Hegel, for by raising the contradiction in a work of art Spirit is able to reconcile *nomos* and *physis* and thus remove the narrow purview of each element of social being by drawing their one-sidedness into a new unity.⁵³

For Castoriadis, by ascribing *Antigone* to a greater historical movement Hegel fails to see Sophocles' conscious confrontation with his tradition. Sophocles' does not intend to reconcile nature and law but to show that *nature can give no law*. In other words, Sophocles uses Antigone and Creon to show that neither nature nor law can be called upon as the final source of justification for our action. While each think that they are being true to their own gods, the gods

52 See Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*, pp. 267–289.

53 Hegel, G.W.F. (1975). Knox, T. (Trans). *Aesthetics: Lectures on fine art*. pp. 1193 ff. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

of nature or of the city, both act upon arguments that are not only justified by their own gods but that are equally justified by their opponent's gods.⁵⁴ For example, Antigone claims to uphold the law of the gods on the grounds that a brother is irreplaceable when one's parents are dead, and that if she had a husband or son it would be different. For Hegel this line is immensely significant, showing that Antigone's commitment to the gods turns on her *natural* commitment to her family, meaning that she embodies a universal of ethical life: divine law.⁵⁵ However, neither divine nor human law recognizes a distinction between the ethical significance of a brother over a father or husband, and we see that Antigone merely finds a convenient justification for her actions in the supposed divinity of her own law. Sophocles' tragedy does not disclose a rationalist view of the world where right collides with right. Antigone's notion of right is not simply one-sided but *it is her own*. Sophocles exposes the significant dilemma involved in appealing to *any* fixed notion of right. Appealing to either nature or human law cannot guarantee the right cause of human action and neither can they be harmoniously reconciled. In Castoriadis' mind, *Antigone* exposes the risk inherent to the political domain wherein any reference to either nature or law capable of guaranteeing the rightness of political decisions is seen to be limited.

Thus the tragedies provide a new criteria for assessing the validity of a claim to legitimacy: *hubris*. By exploring claims of legitimacy as the practice of human judgment tragedy presents *hubris* not as the transgression of some natural or divine limit (i.e. in terms of ethics) but as a transgression of the limits of judgment. In the tragic view, *hubris* is the transgression of the chaotic aesthetic sphere, revealing that the appeal to divine or human laws can occlude the indeterminacy of the decision at hand. We can read tragedy as a civic practice, a kind of *ekklesia* that draws human judgments before the scrutiny of the jury, the spectators. Just as the *ekklesia* orientates the jury to a new mode of assessing validity, so does the theatre (*theatron*, the 'place of seeing') orientate the spectators to a critical relation to their tradition. From the vantage of the

54 Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*, p. 285.

55 For Hegel, Antigone's commitment to her brother is a necessary law endowed to her by nature: 'Nature, not the accident of circumstances or choice, assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law.' Because she represents the divine law of family life, Antigone cannot be recognised in the public sphere. She can, however, be recognised by her brother, meaning that the 'loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest.' In Hegel's mind Antigone is not so much an agent making choices as the embodiment of a universal. Her action is thus necessitated. Hegel, (1977). Miller, A.V. (Trans). *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. p. 280, 275. Oxford: Oxford Universities Press.

ekklesia or the theatre we see that nothing can guarantee one's action, neither divine nor human law. We have only our judgment, our search for a universal within a complex array of phenomena, to balance the dissonant parts of our experience and to decide on a course of action that holds them together. Both Antigone and Creon prove to be guilty of *hubris* even though one transgresses the civic law and the other the moral law, for both transgress the limits of judgment by claiming to have an absolute ground. A political regime that orientated by the limits of judgment must maintain the view that when it comes to political decision making there is only *doxa* and that nobody possesses an *episteme* of things political.⁵⁶

For Castoriadis, Antigone and Creon represent two limits of judgment that provide the poles that society must navigate if it is to realise its autonomy. A society transgresses the first limit, the religious limit, when it expels chaos and reintroduces it as God, Nature or Reason. In other words, it occludes the chaos of judgment when it grounds itself on a determinative ontology that claims to exhaust the world in its signifying power (in Castoriadis' mind, even the Marxism of the First and Second Internationals fall under this category). This position is represented by Antigone. Antigone is not interested in defending her action in social terms but takes her conception of the divine as immediate, connected to the very being of the Cosmos (i.e. to nature, to *physis*). She feels that her actions are necessitated by the mandates of nature, and it is not until she is denied recognition by public execution that she recognises her decision to follow the gods as her own desire for public recognition.⁵⁷ When she is sentenced to an execution hidden from the sight of the citizens she experiences terror for the first time as her certainty wavers.⁵⁸ Terror is the emotion that

56 Castoriadis, *The Castoriadis Reader*, p. 274. Here Castoriadis builds from Aristotle's assertion that 'practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is not knowledge (*episteme*). Practical wisdom is not knowledge for it is concerned with the 'ultimate particular', not an object of knowledge but a perception. It involves the senses and judging a particular situation so as to realize a particular goal or value. Thus it is akin to Kant's reflective judgment while knowledge is similar to Kant's determinative judgment. *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Aristotle. (1984). *The Complete Works*. 1142b23. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

57 'And why should I, in my misfortune, keep looking to/The gods for help? To whom shall I call out/To fight as my ally, when my reverence/Has earned me charges of irreverence?' Sophocles. (1974). *Antigone*. In Watling, E. (Trans). *The Theban Plays*. ll. 988–991. England: Penguin Books.

58 The pace of the scene accelerates as Creon and the Chorus break into short, chanted lines (*stichomythia*), leading Antigone to utter a cry that reveals her terror: 'Oh! That pronouncement / comes very near to death!' As above in Sophocles, (1974). *Antigone*. l. 1001.

leads to reversal, for it means that Antigone begins to doubt the postulates that formerly ensured her identity dwelt in the being of nature.

The second limit is represented by Creon and is the tendency of society toward totalitarian justice. This limit is exemplified by a society that believes it can follow a logic or principle of justice that can guarantee the correctness of its action and political outcomes (i.e. that *nomos* is absolute). Even a society that breaks from the religious side can swing to the opposite mistake by thinking itself to be infallible. Both government and individuals can use such principles and procedures to cover over the risk inherent to judgment rather than taking responsibility for their own actions. Creon recognizes that divine law is not purposive but that it must be instituted though human law if it is to be actively involved in the society. He cannot accept deviation from the law at the demands of anyone's god, thus killing his son's lover and bringing destruction upon his entire household. He recognises the *hubris* of his path only when his family, his natural connection to the earth, lies in ruins. He does not wait for the people or the Chorus to judge him, but freely banishes himself:

[I] have killed unwittingly
 My son, my wife.
 I know not where I should turn,
 Where to look for help.
 My hands have done amiss, my head is bowed
 With fate too heavy for me.⁵⁹

For Castoriadis, Creon and Antigone represent two kinds of idolatry that occlude the chaotic basis of judgment by holding their ideas to be stable and determinative. They act in the conviction that the correctness of their action is guaranteed in relation to the being of the world whether it be in the form of law or the gods. Both represent a form of *hubris*, transgressing an unseen limit of judgment in order to justify the legitimacy of their actions. Sophocles' tragedy presents the chaotic basis of society that entails that *nothing* can provide a guarantee for justice, not even the gods or the law. This is not to say that the gods or the laws should be ignored, but that if we hold anything as a guarantee it merely occludes the indeterminacy of judgment—the freedom of the imagination to choose, decide and act—that premises our action, thus preventing us from listening to those who see otherwise.

59 Sophocles. (1974). *Antigone*. ll. 1340–1345.

The climax of *Antigone*, for Castoriadis, is Haemon's confrontation with Creon. The Chorus anticipates this confrontation in the famous 'ode to man' that celebrates the terrifying ability of human beings to build cities and create institutions while recognising their profound failure to control themselves, orientating us to a proper awe of the most unsettling and enigmatic being: the human being. The ode finishes with an instruction, praising the one who is able to weave together 'the laws of the land and the justice of the gods to which he has sworn.'⁶⁰ This line criticizes *both* Antigone and Creon. Antigone's self-deceived motives are exposed when she argues that she upholds 'divine law' on the grounds that, when an orphan, a brother is irreplaceable. As for Creon, his reasons are irrefutable, for no city can exist without human laws just as no city can tolerate treason and bearing arms against one's own country. Sophocles draws our attention to the fact that neither Creon nor Antigone listen to the reasons of the other, insisting on their own, self-sure notion of right. Both approach the situation with a predetermined universal and base their judgment on a closed order of meaning that is irrefutable from the outside. Until they recognise their error when all is too late, neither accept that their view might not exhaust all of reality. When Haemon confronts his father, he recognizes that he cannot prove his father wrong, for within the closure of his notion of right Creon's reasoning is sound. Rather, he voices what Castoriadis claims to be the play's main idea, begging Creon 'not to be wise alone.'⁶¹

Not being wise alone calls for an enlarged cognition where we recognise that our own take on reality is but one among many. Haemon's warning leads Castoriadis to the final lines of the play to argue that Sophocles' ultimately glorifies *phronein* over thinking alone:

Of happiness the crown
 And chiefest part
 Is wisdom (*phronein*), and to hold
 The gods in awe.
 This is the law
 That, seeing the stricken heart
 Of pride brought down,
 We learn when we are old.⁶²

60 This is Castoriadis' own, literal translation of the text. More poetically it is rendered 'Great honour is given / And power is given to him who upholdeth his country's laws / And the justice of heaven.' Sophocles. (1974). *Antigone*. In *The Theban Plays*. ll. 354–6.

61 Sophocles. (1974.) *Antigone*. In *The Theban Plays*. ll. 707–9.

62 Sophocles. (1974). *Antigone*. In *The Theban Plays*, ll. 1348–55.

The law that the stricken heart learns once its pride has been brought down is not a law at all, but wisdom, *phronesis*. We find ourselves having come full circle from philosophy to art and now back to philosophy again. Philosophy begins with *thaumazein*, the dehabituating of conventional modes of understanding when faced with the excess that shines from what we see, leading us to wonder, to awe. Tragedy, to modify Aeschylus' words, corrects our tendency to 'violate the awe that *life* must claim'. 'Awe' has immense significance for imaginative freedom, for it draws us into a position that recognises the excess that lies beyond our cognition. It is the fitting response to the excessive disorder of the world, and tragedy orients us toward a proper awe by confronting us with the error and responsibility we occlude through self-certainty, breaking down our self-sure reasons and exposing the reality that nothing can guarantee the correctness of action. Sophocles' drama presents the chaos on which society is creatively formed, revealing that through being confronted with human catastrophe we find the highest political virtue to be a process of reflecting on experience, actively listening to the reasoning of others and making deliberative judgments based upon the insights we gain. This is, for Castoriadis, what the ancient notion of *phronesis* means. It is the correct operation of judgment, involving the exercise of deliberation wherein we approach a particular situation without a predetermined idea. It involves the weighing up of our perceptions, the opinions of others and the values we hold in order to make a fallible but well-formed judgment. Thus *phronesis* accepts the reality that our immediate opinions often occlude desires that lie hidden, facts to which we are ignorant and opinions that we have not considered. It is a mode of judgment wherein we are ready to be altered and transformed, where the task is to 'weave together' the paradoxical demands of human life.

However, Castoriadis' eagerness to view art as the unveiling of chaos results in a failure to capitalise on the second lesson provided by the Chorus that has been learnt throughout the course of *Antigone*: 'and to hold the gods in awe.' This line is ultimately levelled at Creon who rejected the ethical demands placed on him by divine law. Likewise, Castoriadis seems to move from *thaumazein* to the chaos of being without considering the weight of the institutions that bind us. In other words, he occludes the demand of *ethics* that, for the tragic imagination, cannot guarantee righteous zeal as it does for Antigone but *can* call us to stand in awe of the divine law that ties us to family, our children, the gods and ourselves. While Castoriadis attempts to reject ethics for his vision of the political, aesthetic sphere, we cannot reject the demands placed on us by our ethical mores, by our tradition and the aesthetic rules that bind us, no more than we can escape the imaginary institutions of society. What we can do is call them into question and recognise they are not fixed to any

substantial ground. The historical confluence of law and mythical religion in fifth-century Athens did not cause the Athenians to throw away their understanding of ethics, but turned on the awareness that (1) the divine stands at such a distance that to conceptualise the correctness of an action in terms of divine authority transgresses the limits of human judgment, and (2) that the justice of the gods (ethics) still places demands on us.

In the tragic imagination, the distance felt between the gods and the city does not entail that the divine is rejected but that its presence is far enough removed as to render the human agent totally responsible for their own action. The agent is thus required to give reasons for their decisions that are neither self-justifying nor appeal to an extra-social source, yet they are simultaneously held accountable to the values of the gods (justice, truth etc.) that are veiled but nevertheless active in the ethical sphere. In other words, the tragic imagination holds nature and human law in paradoxical tension: at the same time it presents humans as reason-giving and receiving beings (their nature is to be rational) and yet their rationality is radically disconnected from nature. They have the profound ability to make laws that are binding, but these laws are self-created and not ontologically connected to the being of the world. In the tragic view the human ability to self-legislate does not entail a complete break with nature—it does not present humans standing triumphant over what limits them. The tragedies present the paradoxical reality of the being that is both determined yet free, self-created yet bound by its own creation.

Castoriadis polemically over-emphasises our ability to unveil chaos at the expense of recognising the demands of cosmos in the attempt make his primary point heard: that we have no ground to stand on other than the disruptive presence of chaos. Thus his notion of the chaos of being is often misunderstood as a kind of voluntarism, for it seems that imagination is guided by mere will, reducing the social order to Nietzsche's will to power. Indeed, if chaos can be made present and victorious over cosmos with ease, then Castoriadis' philosophical project would collapse into a Nietzschean metaphysics of the eternal return where reason is the original creative *disorder*, operating in much the same way as Deleuze's 'aleatory point'.⁶³ For Deleuze, the aleatory point is an original, random creative disorder, where chaos is an endless reordering and thus cannot be truly novel. The meaning that emerges from the chaos of creation is a reconfiguration of the finite substance available, meaning that we are destined to eternal sameness. Yet if freedom is simply chaos then we face a significant problem, for all would be creativity and we would have no

63 See Deleuze. (1994). Patton, P. (Trans). *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press, and Castoriadis, *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*, p. 139.

laws or ideas with which to think or judge. In this figuration, humanity would be determined to be indeterminate; its absolute freedom would turn out to be absolute unfreedom.

Yet Castoriadis' philosophical project does not allow such a conclusion. The notion of chaos as complete disorder causes the paradox of the imagination—that it is both lawless and lawful—to disappear. The lucidity of Castoriadis' philosophical project lies in his ability to draw this paradox into the centre, finding in Kant's notion of the aesthetic sphere an exciting philosophical and political vision. The imagination is normative: it forms, shapes and synthesises the sensory manifold and creates laws to which it can bind itself. Thus it both lawful and without law. Even to speak of 'chaos' is to draw an aesthetic idea into presence, one that is historically particular to the life-world of antiquity and yet still orientates us to an indeterminate reality. The world of the imagination is meaningful but this meaning is incomplete and always threatened by its own creativity. Philosophy is the attempt to adapt and refine our ideas yet also to keep them open to question, to orient us toward the continued questioning of our ideas in every moment.

The paradox of tradition and novelty in Castoriadis' project confronts the nihilism of Deleuze's aleatory point. The radical imagination is a rupturing energy that does not forever play with the chaotic material of nature. Rather, it creates. It does not reconfigure the material available but goes beyond it, meaning that what it creates is both lawful, for it is only intelligible from within its tradition, and lawless, for it goes beyond its tradition. It takes rule from the aesthetic sphere of human creativity in the form of imaginary institutions and is instrumental in transforming them. The imagination is lawless yet lawful, free yet ordered, constituting the paradox that grounds philosophical thinking and throws imagination onto its own freedom.

Concluding Remarks

For Castoriadis, the tragedies give insight into the limitations of humanity while holding *anthropos* as a radical question oscillating between inherited and self-created poles. They reveal that philosophy likewise has a paradoxical task: to unveil our fundamental freedom through an ancient tradition. To undertake philosophical thinking is to attempt to liberate oneself from imaginary institutions through the resources found in the tradition of liberation. In elucidating this task Castoriadis leaves a captivating yet an incomplete project. The task is never complete but a constant, creative endeavour to think more than there is. Castoriadis attempts to extend the radical project of self-alteration begun in

ancient Greece into the present, uniting politics, philosophy and, toward the end of his philosophical development, artistic representation in the same project of elucidation and liberation. The Greek tragedies draw us into a historical moment of rupture where the paradoxical realities of human life are brought into view, dehabituating us from inherited modes of knowing and throwing us into the dangerous task of self-understanding and alteration: of freedom.

Castoriadis argues that art is a window into chaos; it reveals that the social world is always open to question and transformation. Yet it holds the paradoxical reality of our being in tension, for it is at once a window into chaos and the creation of a cosmos. It is lawless and lawful, orientating us toward both our fundamental creativity and the structures we have inherited that give form to our experience. For Castoriadis, in the moment of wonder, of *thaumazein*, we find our desire for complete, exhaustive knowledge to be stilled before the terror and beauty of the fractured world. This moment of 'disinterested pleasure', he suggests, is the meaning of Aristotle's *katharsis*, cleansing us of our desire for self-certainty and opening us to the task of practical judgment.⁶⁴ Yet it can only be experienced once we have gone through the pity and terror of artistic presentation, for our participation in the artwork is absolutely necessary. In the moment of awe, of wonder, we are transformed. We enter the beginning of philosophy where paradoxical reality is the very energy of thought.

64 Castoriadis, *Fenêtre Sur Le Chaos*, pp. 155–156.

Philosophy and Theatre: Cornelius Castoriadis on the Imaginary Structure of Meanings in Theatre and Performance

George P. Pefanis

In the context of theatre studies, Greek philosophical thought has been mostly represented by the ancient philosophers, namely by Plato and Aristotle. Nevertheless, the study of Cornelius Castoriadis's thought about social imaginary and the function of art will be probably very fruitful in focusing on the creative character of theatre performance. This paper is an essay of formatting an intelligible dialogue between Castoriadis, Lehmann and Gilles Deleuze-Felix Guattari, concerning the structure and the constructive character of meanings in the theatre (text and performance)—an era where “there is no image that does not have a minimum meaning and there is no meaning that is not borne by an image”—as well as the role of social imaginary with regard to the post-modern or to the so-called postdramatic theatre.

“What holds a society together is the holding-together of its world of significations”¹

Contemplating on the meanders of theory of the last decades of the 20th century the notion of something constantly dying becomes apparent. It is a feeling that a socio-historical world is losing some of its organic parts. After the death of God (Nietzsche), of the father (Freud), follow the death of the man (Foucault), of the writer, of the subject, the end of history and ideologies, even the end of theory.²

¹ Castoriadis, C. (1987). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

² Stathis Gourgouris (2006: 500) believes that those who preach the end of ideologies (or the end of history) are like children who invent an incoherent language of their own to fill their inner emptiness. The real end implied—although evident to all of us—is the worst nightmare of liberalism, the end of the search for happiness. Gourgouris Stathis, (2006) *Does Literature Think? Literature as Theory For an Antimythical Era*. Athens: Nefeli.

In the theories of theatre “deaths” are imported from other cognitive fields. It is the shift of the paradigm that is preferred, the epistemological turns to point out the deconstruction of some canonistic entities or even the “crises”—a mild term that does not name death but the abolition of a basic principal or of a structural relation: the crisis of the myth, of the *dramatis personae* or the character, of the dialogue and the relation between the audience and the stage. But what is really dying?

What is subject to crisis? From a general point of view it is the representation as a way of conceiving and expressing the world of men that is in crisis, at least in these actions and phenomena that are subject to theatricality.³ What is re-presented on stage is presupposed off stage and conducts a possibility of reproducing itself. The crisis of representation could therefore mean the crisis of the priority—in terms of ontology—of the represented subject to the action of re-presentation, of the text to the action on stage, of the *dramatis personae* to the actor impersonating it. From the point of view of the theatre and philosophical problematic, a closer reading of some texts by Cornelius Castoriadis and a focus on basic points of his thinking on imaginary meanings and social creation would be interesting.

Castoriadis (1922–1997), a multidimensional and pivotal figure in the fields of philosophy, epistemology, psychoanalysis and political thinking is closely related to the opening of the scene, the breaking of the established ways of thinking and acting, the creation of new ways of instituting society.⁴ The notion of creation runs through his entire work. At the bedrock of this notion a thought on art is developed, sometimes on theatre in particular, deriving from the *mythos*⁵ and

3 Fischer-Lichte, E. (2001). *Theatralität und die Krisen der Repräsentation*. Stuttgart: Metzler.

4 Among recent studies on Castoriadis see Bachofen Blaise—Sion Elbaz—Nicolas Poirier—Jean-Claude Poizat: 2008 *Cornelius Castoriadis: Réinventer l'autonomie*, Paris: Editions du Sandre; Caumières Philippe, 2007 *Castoriadis: Le projet d'autonomie*. Paris: Michalon; Labelle Gilles' 2001 “Two refoundation projects of democracy in contemporary French philosophy: Cornelius Castoriadis and Jacques Rancière”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27/4: 75–103; Poirier Nicolas, 2004 *Castoriadis: L'imaginaire radical*. Paris: P.U.F.; 2011 *L'ontologie politique de Cornélius Castoriadis. Création et Institution*. Paris: Payot; Prat Jean-Louis; 2006 *Introduction à Castoriadis*. Paris: La Découverte.

5 Castoriadis, C. (2007a). *Ελληνική ιδιαιτερότητα. Τόμος Α΄. Από τον Όμηρο στον Ηράκλειτο. Η Σεμινάρια 1982–1983*. pp. 249–28. Αθήνα: Κριτική. See also Castoriadis Cornelius' 1987 *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press; 1991 *Τα σταυροδρόμια του λαβύρινθου, (The Crossroads of Labyrinth)*.=Athens: Ypsilon; 1992 *Ο θρυμματισμένος κόσμος (The World in Fragments)*, Athens: Ypsilon; 1993 “Αισχύλεια ανθρωπογονία και σοφόκλεια αυτοδημιουργία του ανθρώπου” (“Aeschylean Anthropology and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Anthropolos”) in *Ανθρωπολογία, πολιτική, φιλοσοφία. Πέντε διαλέξεις στη Βόρειο Ελλάδα (Anthropology, Politics,*

the major works of ancient Greek drama⁶ My main argument is that this thought is crucial for the analysis of contemporary theories on theatre performance.

Creation

The notion of creation lies at the very centre of the opposition of Castoriadis's thought to the ensemblistic-identitarian logic and tradition of the western metaphysics that it reproduces. The based on stable causality results, the deduction of differences to one primary identity from which they derive, the submission of the beings to a greater being, on which they are founded and can be constituted as such, are some of the aspects of this identitarian logic that tends to link the unfamiliar to the familiar and absorb changes, the emergence of new forms within the realm of what is constantly changing yet remains the same.

All kinds of determinisms, both the static ones regarding the assumptions they attempt to perform and these that enter the fields of evolutionism, stifle one way or the other the new form (*eidōs*) emerging, trying to expel it from the being. It is in this emergence according to Castoriadis that lays the creative power of men and societies. Creation *ex nihilo* very often mentioned in his texts doesn't refer to an act *in nihilo* nor *cum nihilo*,⁷ creation isn't performed from nothing or with nothing. It is a radical unpredictable act performed

Philosophy. Five Lectures in North Greece). Athens: Ypsilon, 11–31. (Also found in P. Arnason and P. Murphy (eds), *Agon, Logos, Polis: The Greek Achievement and its Aftermath*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag: 138–154; 1994 “The Discovery of the Imagination”, *Constellation* 1/2: 183–213; 1995 *Χώροι του ανθρώπου (Domains of man)*. Athens: Ypsilon; 1997 *Les carrefours du labyrinthe V*, Paris: Seuil; 1997(a) “Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics”, *Thesis Eleven* 49: 99–116; 1999 *Figures du pensable. Les carrefours du labyrinthe VI*. Paris: Seuil; 2000 *Η άνοδος της ασημαντότητας (The Rise of the Insignificance)*. Athens: Ypsilon; *Παράθυρο στο χάος (Window to Chaos)*. Athens: Ypsilon; 2007a *Η ελληνική ιδιαιτερότητα. Τόμος Α΄. Από τον Όμηρο στον Ηράκλειτο. Σεμινάρια 1982–1983*. Αθήνα: Κριτική; 2008 *Η ελληνική ιδιαιτερότητα. Τόμος Β΄. Η πόλις και οι νόμοι. Σεμινάρια 1983–1984 (The Greek Singularity. Volume B΄. The City and the Laws. Seminars 1983–1984)*. Athens: Kritiki.

- 6 Castoriadis, C. (1993). “Αισχύλεια ανθρωπογονία και σοφόκλεια αυτοδημιουργία του ανθρώπου” (“Aeschylean Anthropology and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Anthropos”). In *Ανθρωπολογία, πολιτική, φιλοσοφία. Πέντε διαλέξεις στη Βόρειο Ελλάδα (Anthropology, Politics, Philosophy. Five Lectures in North Greece)*. pp. 11–31. Athens: Ypsilon. Also see Castoriadis, C. (2008). *Η ελληνική ιδιαιτερότητα. Τόμος Β΄. Η πόλις και οι νόμοι. Σεμινάρια 1983–1984 (The Greek Singularity. Volume B΄. The City and the Laws. Seminars 1983–1984)*. pp. 207–220, 333–349 και 356–360. Athens: Kritiki.
- 7 Castoriadis, C. (1997). *Les carrefours du labyrinthe V*. pp. 212, 228, 268 Paris: Seuil.

within something pre-existing, within the being, using elements from what pre-exists. What emerges in the end is a new work, a new form not just a figure but an organic entity between what is seen and the successive strata behind appearances⁸ an entity stemming out from chaos, meaning the infinite state of being and the creative capacity of man. An institution, an imaginary social meaning, a musical composition, a myth, a philosophical idea, a theatre play as well as its performance are creations inseparable from chaos. “Chaos is the ground of being” Castoriadis argues. “It’s even the groundlessness of being. It’s the abyss that is behind every existent thing. And as a matter of fact, this determination that the creation of forms is ensures that chaos will always also present itself as cosmos, i.e. as organized world in the broadest sense of the term, as order”⁹ That is to say that the creation *ex nihilo* doesn’t refer to any kind of parthenogenesis but means the emergence of a new form from the chaos, a new world that couldn’t be deduced in a causal binding.

The Imaginary

This focal feature of creation is closely linked with the notions of imagination, historicity and socialisation. We create because we have imagination, this potentiality of the psyche, which is indeterminate and indeterminable, and, at the same time, a determining potentiality.¹⁰ Castoriadis doesn’t refer to the common meaning of imagination as defined by Aristotle as a motion “ὑπό τῆς αἰσθησεως τῆς κατ’ ἐνέργειαν γιγνομένη”, that comes second and later was reduced to the framework of a simple devise, or a mere restructuring of past elements, but to the much more radical notion of “primary imagination”¹¹ linked to the latter only as a homonym. The Stagirean philosopher conceived this radical imagination by writing that “never does the soul think without phantasm”¹² but avoids to classify it because—as Castoriadis points out—if every thought is necessarily the viewing of a mental image (*phantasm*), then, “truly speaking, one cannot know whether and how the first *noemata*—the irreducible, originary, elementary *noemata*—are not pure and simple phantasms.”¹³ That

8 Castoriadis, C. (1993). p. 103.

9 Castoriadis, C. (1999). *Figures du pensable. Les carrefours du labyrinthe VI*. p. 339. Paris: Seuil. Also, (2007). *Παράθυρο στο χάος (Window to Chaos)*. pp. 161–167. Athens: Ypsilon.

10 Castoriadis, C. (1994). “The Discovery of the Imagination”. pp. 212. *Constellation* 1/2: 183–213. Also in (1997a). “Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics”. pp. 103–105. *Thesis Eleven* 49: 99–116.

11 Castoriadis, C. (1994). p. 184.

12 Aristotle: *De Anima* III, 3.

13 Castoriadis, C. (1994) p. 189.

would lead if not to the dominance of imagination over the intellect, at least to its placement at the very centre of the world of thought. But something like this is not possible to happen only in the individual sphere: imagination should be recognized hand in hand with the other dimension of the radical imaginary.¹⁴ It should be conceived within and through an “instituting society as source of ontological creation deploying itself as history;”¹⁵ history inevitably incorporating in its flow memory as well to the extent that it is imagination.

Imagination is conceived only within history and history is enacted imagination as it actuates the pre-existing magmas of figures that memory offers. The Muses are daughters of Mnemosene, they are nourished by her but in history they themselves continue to nourish new forms and meanings. History becomes therefore the dynamic field where these daughters become mothers of their mother.¹⁶ The magmas of memory and the creative powers of the imaginary evolve in time in mutual interaction.

History, Meanings and Magmas

When Castoriadis talks about imagination he means the imagination created within and from a society and a history. According to his thought, the being is chaos irregularly stratified, the abyss. But it is also time; the being is actually towards-being, a continuous self-alteration. That means that time is nothing but creation, otherwise it would be just a useless fourth dimension.¹⁷ If history isn't merely the unfolding of a causal and preconditioned succession of facts, this happens because time is the perpetual possibility of the emergence of the other and not a passive and neutral repetition.

As time is the time of change, history, in the same way, cannot be restricted in the result of the combination of the same elements, but it is constituted as the creation of new elements.¹⁸ This means that history is otherness and creation or, to be more precise, creation of the otherness, or merely: creation.

14 On this point see Klimis Sophie et al. ii. (2006) *L'imaginaire selon Castoriadis: Thèmes et enjeux*. Bruxelles: Publications des Facultés Univesritaires Saint-Louis; Poirier Nicolas, 2004 *Castoriadis: L'imaginaire radical*.

15 Castoriadis, C. (1994). p. 212.

16 Castoriadis, C. (2007a) p. 150.

17 Castoriadis, C. (1994a) “The logic of magmas and the question of autonomy.” p. 150. In *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 20,1/2: 123–154. Also see (1995). *Χώροι του ανθρώπου*. (*Domains of man*). p. 111. Athens: Ύψilon.

18 On the concept of “temporalité” and “création” in the history see Pastor Jean-Philippe, 2003 *Devenir et temporalité: La création des possibles chez Cornélius Castoriadis*. Paris: Moonstone-PhoneReader; Caumières Philippe—Sophie Klimis—Laurent Van Eynde, 2007 *Cahiers*

Since societies stem out of history (and not the natural world—there is no equivalent of any genetic code in social ontology) and history—in the strict sense—have only constituted and constituting societies (not the mountains or the herds of wolves), then both societies and histories can't be interpreted by some stable causes, the “permanent” biological needs or the “everlasting” pulsions of the soul, the mechanisms of power or the transcendental desires for instance.

All these factors aren't permanent and firm causes but variable parameters that frame up a complex grid of meanings within the society. These meanings that are instilled in society and guide its whole life don't form a system; they appear as magma: the magma of social imaginary meanings that is embodied in the constitutions of the societies.¹⁹ Meanings are never determined in themselves; they are infinitely determinable, without being determined, because the definitions each time don't entail a closure (how meanings such as totem, taboo, Gods, God, polis, merchandise, wealth, homeland etc. can have closed meaning while they are ontological creations;)²⁰ The magma placed at the core of the meanings makes them continually refer to a limitless number of other meanings.²¹

Social imaginary meanings must be considered therefore as flows of meanings outside every ensemblistic-identitist logic that entails differentiated and defined elements of a set. The latter doesn't imply that ensemblistic organizations are absent from the magma. On the contrary, it comprehends an indefinite number of them. Meanings don't expel logic (ratio) but they are not deducible to it. Besides, we can extract from the magma setist organizations in indefinite number, but which can never be recovered by a setist combination of any of these organizations.²²

Castoriadis, tome 2: *Imaginaire et création historique*. Bruxelles: Publications des Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis.

19 Castoriadis, C. (1995). p. 117.

20 Castoriadis, C. (1999). pp. 115–126, 261–276.

21 Castoriadis, C. (1987). pp. 345–351.

22 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 345. (1994a). p. 130. Castoriadis describes the concept of magma in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. After noting that the best intuitive support the reader can present to himself is to think of ‘all the significations of his language’ or ‘all the representations of his life, underlines: “We have to think of a multiplicity which is not one in the received sense of the term but which we mark out as such, and which is not a multiplicity in the sense that we could actually or virtually enumerate what it ‘contains’ but in which we could mark out in each case terms which are not absolutely jumbled together. Or, we might think of an indefinite number of terms, which may possible change, assembled together by an optionally transitive pre-relation (referral); or of the holding-

To become more precise the “logic”, the symbols, the codes, the cognitive and empirical starting points, the contents of tradition and the historical past constitute necessary conditions for the existence of the imaginary magmas of society but not sufficient ones. They are not sufficient because they cannot explain the creation of imaginary meanings by themselves. They are necessary because imaginary meanings can’t be created without them. It is in this necessity and non-sufficiency that we should seek the content of historicity.

The historic feature of an imaginary meaning lies precisely in its non-sufficient deduction in certain explanatory schemes in some kind of every ensemblistic-identitist logic and, at the same time, in its necessary link to the past. This stands for both the social and the individual level. If the past wasn’t creation we wouldn’t have the need to return to it, because “the history of the individual—and the society—is also a history of self-creation”. Both individuals and societies can only find themselves only if they return to where they were at a certain moment in time.²³

The way of the return is always determined by the very moment, that is to say by the present. But this present remains historical, open to the future, pending regarding the options and directions of the action, only to the extent that it is defined by a certain past. Historicity therefore is also defined by tradition. For Castoriadis contemporary western societies experience their relation with the past and tradition in a way constituting a historical innovation: by the most radical externality, to the extent that either the imitation, or denial for denial prevails. Both tendencies conclude in a deep indifference²⁴ or a fake reproduction of past elements in “free” new mixtures.

Castoriadis was highly critical of the strange mixture of modernist fraud and museumification,²⁵ pointing out the transformation of modernism to an end in itself, which produces “forgeries” accepted only in the sake of the cultural neo-illiteracy of the public. During the 70’s he refers in particular to the admiration of the Parisian audience for stage directions repeating the 1920’ devises, as an example of a museumification of art. To his view art was influenced by

together of distinct-indistinct components of a manifold; or, again, of an indefinitely blurred bundle of conjunctive fabrics, made up of different Cloths and yet homogeneous, everywhere studded with virtual and evanescent singularities” (Castoriadis 1987: 344).

23 Castoriadis, C. (1991). *Τα σταυροδρόμια του λαβύρινθου*, (*The Crossroads of Labyrinth*). pp. 58–59. Athens: Ypsilon.

24 Castoriadis, C. (2000). *Η άνοδος της ασημαντότητας* (*The Rise of the Insignificance*). pp. 29, 99. Athens: Ypsilon.

25 Castoriadis, C. (1992). *Ο θρυμματισμένος κόσμος* (*The World in Fragments*). pp. 11–25. Athens: Ypsilon.

trends that lead to Alexandrianism, phenomenon heightened by the substitution of creative thought by commentary and interpretation.²⁶

The Criticism to Postmodernism

This substitution leads us directly to the problematic on postmodern syncretism in theatre: From the rejection of big narrations to the crisis of the myth and the plot, to its' postadramatic variations and the crisis of the dialogue. Despite the attempt of posterior criticism to detect relations between the late Castoriadian thought, mainly, and the aspirations of postmodernism²⁷ (to the extent that society is conceived within the being as a flux of unpredictable and non-deductible alterations which deny the ontology of duration and of the unchangeable truth), Castoriadis relates in an explicit and violently opposing way the criticism on "onto-theolo-phallo-centrism" and more specific the "theory of postmodernism" to the sterility of the modern era and its incompetence to create those new social meanings that would allow a substantial act of controversy.

In that way, the "end of philosophy" seems as a ridiculous declaration and the "end of master narratives", another narration by itself, that Lyotard put forth early (1984) as a cloudy and sloppy notion, producing nothing more than comments for the works and the ideas of the past, deliberately avoiding to deal with the scientific, social, historical and political issues of our times. Besides, Castoriadis never ceased to believe in the all-time value of these "master narratives", since we constantly return to them, discovering things that we hadn't realised in the past. But if the grand narrative is subject to constant reinvention,²⁸ then a rather stable ensemble is formed, restricting—if not negating—postmodern relativism. The post-modern (or deconstructive)²⁹ criticism of rationalism ends up to become irrationalism itself, which is the

26 Castoriadis, C. (2000). pp. 24–25.

27 On this point see the special issue of *Democracy and Nature* 7:1, 2001 and Fotopoulos, Takis (2007) "The Democratic Project and Postmodernism", in *Psyche, Logos, Polis*. Athens: Ypsilon: 259–272.

28 Castoriadis, C. (2007a). pp. 161–162.

29 According to Castoriadis (2000: 121), "ideology" and "mystification" of deconstructionism are based upon the "guilt" of the West, and they proceed from an illegitimate mixture in which the critique of instrumental and instrumentalized rationalism is surreptitiously thrown together "with a denigration of the ideas of truth, autonomy, and responsibility".

other side of rationalism to the extent that it has no principle to oppose to the metaphysics of ratio.³⁰

Post-modern banalities are rejected as self-appraisal of a stupid trend and as religious contents of a nonsense,³¹ limited in what regards its artistic manifestations to a sterile collage, allowing—if not evoking—the rendering of prestige to eclecticism and to the recycling of the artworks of the past. As he puts it: “post-modern art paid us a great service: she revealed how great modern art has been.”³² Postmodernism is considered as generalised conformism which involves a general return to heteronomy.³³ The incoherent looting of the cultural products of the past and the arbitrary mingling of elements and techniques end up in conglomerations of words, actions and objects that disclose not only the loss of meaning but the loss of the ability to be in quest of the meaning and the form as well.³⁴

The intentional or not ignorance of the historical facts from one hand and the anachronistic update of older elements (images, words, techniques, gestures etc.) through a “loose” montage from the other, not only creates the delusion of atemporality concealing the dehistorisation of art morphemes, but also evokes a crucial emptiness of creation, where a generalized conformism is developed regarding the ideas, the culture, and the art,³⁵ a “conformism of the anticonformism.”³⁶ Of course, as he argues in another text, “the old enters into the new with the signification the new confers upon it—and could not enter back into it otherwise,”³⁷ but for Castoriadis the operative word in the latter statement is the real new, not a fake reproduction of the old and, furthermore, distinctly defined. Otherwise the act of creation gives in to the logic of “anything goes” and ends up in a fruitless relativism that for Castoriadis is not far from what Marcuse called “affirmative culture”³⁸ a culture of passive tolerance and thoughtless hybridism which erodes the function of criticism and (consequently) the democratic institutions.

30 Castoriadis, C. (2000). pp. 104–106.

31 Castoriadis, C. (2007). *Παράθυρο στο χάος* (*Window to Chaos*). p. 131. Athens: Ypsilon.

32 Castoriadis, C. (1992). *Ο θρυμματισμένος κόσμος* (*The World in Fragments*). p. 22. Athens: Ypsilon. Also in (2010). p. 215.

33 Castoriadis, C. (1999). p. 132.

34 Castoriadis, C. (1993). p. 70.

35 Castoriadis, C. (2000). p. 135. Also (2007). p. 128.

36 Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Les Règles se l'art. Genèse et Structure du Champs Littéraire*. p. 232. Paris: Seuil.

37 Castoriadis, C. (1995). p. 125.

38 Marcuse, H. (1985). *Αρνήσεις* (*Denegations*). p. 66. Athens: Ypsilon.

The Work of Art and the Chaos

Here we lie at the very core of the philosophical problematic on the work of art. A problematic both ontological, to the extent that the work of art is viewed as a being within the regions of being (not just a construction or a synthesis), and sociological to the extent that it is created (not just produced) within and by the imaginary meanings of a society, potentially appealing to it as a whole.³⁹

As indicated by Cornelius Castoriadis, a work is artistic to the extent that it emerges through chaos and makes this chaos appear in the eyes of a collectivity. Therefore, it is a “window of society that gazes into the chaos and -at the same time- the form that it is given to that chaos.”⁴⁰ Unlike religion, art veils nothing, on the contrary it opens human gaze towards chaos. Unlike, once more, the Heideggerian revelation of beings within their selves, through the work of art,⁴¹ the Castoridian work of art doesn't reveal the being, that remains pre-existing and latent. On the contrary, it evokes the emergence of a new being, an autonomous form (eidos) according to Platonic terminology.

The genuine art takes root in the social imaginary significations; it is defined by the historicity of the society and reveals the abysmal depth that gapes inside us and inside the world. “Each of us is a bottomless pit, and this bottomlessness is quite evidently opened over the groundlessness of the world. In normal times, we cling to the rim of the pit, over which we pass the greatest part of our lives. But Plato's *Symposium*, Mozart's *Requiem*, and Kafka's *Castle* come from this groundlessness and make us see it.”⁴² Art, and in particular theatre, reminds us that we pass the greater part of our lives in the surface of the things, captive of transient concerns or insignificant activities and that behind the fragile appearances and inside ourselves, inside our bodies, the abyss lurks that we continuously tend to forget. Thus, theatre is this slit “from where we see into the Abyss, (...) it is the presentification of the Abyss.”⁴³

Performances, Images and Meanings

Castoriadis usually writes about art, however, it is obvious that his analyses are also related in particular to theatrical art. As far as the tendency of

39 Castoriadis, C. (2000). p. 103.

40 Castoriadis, C. (2000). p. 87. Also (2007). p. 99.

41 Heidegger, M. (1987). *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part*. Paris: Gallimard.

42 Castoriadis, C. (1995). p. 147.

43 Castoriadis, C. (2007). pp. 46–47, 52.

self-determination of the scenic codes during the process of a performance is concerned, it should be noted that the lack of symptoms of the opposing poles is raised by their reduction to the radical imagination's power. The on stage juxtaposition and the unhierarchy of the theatrical codes thereby, the synchronicity regarding their activation and the subsequent fragmentation of the spectators' perception cannot under any circumstances eliminate the notional cores of a performance and even less, constitute the "aesthetics of the receding meaning", as Hans-Thies Lehmann argues.⁴⁴

Powerful stage lighting for instance could throw shadows on the combinations of the costumes, but again these combinations function as overshadowed by a powerful lighting. A meaning exists already in this very overshadowing.

The aesthetic of the revoked meaning is a non-essential metaphor: Either we don't even have any aesthetic at all or the aesthetic doesn't refer to the revoked meaning but to the meaning of revocation. There is no scenic image that would be deprived of a minimum meaning.⁴⁵ Even the silent, impassive and inert body, that falls in long scenic duration cannot be simply considered in its "physical substance" without any signification, because this "physical substance" is already signified twice: as "physical", namely, without institutioned meanings and as "substance", namely, as a fundamental ontological stratum of meaning.

When Lehmann argues that "postdramatic theatre is presented as a theatre of *self-contained corporeity*,"⁴⁶ he does not only suppress the fact—also stressed by Denis Guénoun—that the theatre is not presence, but presentation and every presentation is engaged with a thought,⁴⁷ neither the strict connection of every scenic body with a group of institutioned meanings of the body, but also the indubitable fact that the corporeity would not be understood without a magma of body's imaginary significances. Castoriadis' typical answer would be "that with regard to the subject there is no image that does not have a minimum meaning and there is no meaning that is not borne by an image."⁴⁸ It wouldn't

44 Lehmann, H.T. (2002). *Le théâtre postdramatique*. p. 139. Paris: L'Arche.

45 Pefanis, G.P. (2007). "The Minimum Text of the Performance and the Intertextual Binding." In *Imagination, Sensuality, Art*, Proceedings of the III Mediterranean Congress of Aesthetics. pp. 162–166. Portorož, Slovenija: Ljubljana See also; 2007a *Σχημές της θεωρίας. Ανοιχτά πεδία στη θεωρία και την κριτική του θεάτρου* (*Scenes of Theory. Open Fields in Theatre Theory and Criticism*). Athens: Papazisis; 2012 *Το θέατρο και τα σύμβολα. Διαδικασίες συμβόλισης του δραματικού λόγου*, (*The Theatre and the Symbols. Symbolisation's Processes of Dramatic Discourse*). Athens: Papazisis.

46 Lehmann, H.T. (2002). p. 150.

47 Guénoun, (1997). *Relation. (Entre théâtre et philosophie)*. p. 39. Paris: Les Cahiers de l'Égaré.

48 Castoriadis, C. (1997) p. 118.

be difficult to imagine what his answer would be to the unexpected completion of the above-mentioned position, namely, that this self-referred, self-focused and self-contained corporeity in postdramatic theatre “is charged with a new signification, (...) a signification that covers the ensemble of the social existence” and with a mystagogy “to a theatre of pure presence, that escapes from the production of meaning”⁴⁹ A body without meanings, without references, an image without content can cover the ensemble of social existence semantically. But what can “social existence” mean outside the socio-historical, what can “pure presence” mean outside the world of significations that emerges in particular social situations and historical coincidences?⁵⁰ On the one hand, “the ensemble of social existence” is inconceivable without a uniform world of significations. Castoriadis clearly says that “what holds a society together is the holding-together of its world of significations.”⁵¹ On the other hand, forasmuch as the signification is that by means of which and on basis of which individuals are formed as social individuals,⁵² what can a “pure presence” represent without significations? What less than a metaphysical construction that aims at the cancellation of the supposed metaphysical constructions of dramatic theatre and in particular of the meaning? Without the minimum meaning, (according to Castoriadis a performance is full of significations and meanings), we run the risk of taking the random as an absolute truth of the theatrical relation. But “a random ensemble still represents (...) a formidable organization”, therefore, a dense stratum of meanings. “If this was the case, it would not lend itself to any organization or it would lend itself to all; in both cases, all coherent discourse and all action” would be impossible.⁵³

Following the Castoriadian thought, what stands for the subject, in our case the actor or the individual spectator, stands for collectivities as well, namely theatre troops and theatre audiences. Every image, even if it is not endowed with all its significations, both during the production and the reception process, must have the least stratum of meaning, that will provide some kind of density, a hint of consistency. On the other hand, meanings in theatre aren’t limited in the realm of abstract notions, but obtain a virtual or embodied

49 Lehmann, H.T. (2002). p. 152.

50 See the criticism on this argument in Pefanis (2007a) pp. 288–292.

51 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 359.

52 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 366.

53 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 341.

substance, both of the stage and the textual level, where the dramatic meaning is designated by an immanent potentiality of performance.⁵⁴

The reader of a theatre play does not only follow the words, nor just visualises the text, but also reads the entire potential *mise-en-scène*, from the elementary acting hints to the more complex stage direction schemes. Like the spectator in front of the stage, the reader in front of the written page creates representations of what he reads or sees, in other words he creates other 'scenes'.

The reception of a theatre performance is never (or should never be) a passive acceptance of what is happening on stage, the enacted play or the embodied by the actors characters. The reception of a performance could be conceived as a new play to the extent that 'it is analytical to the concept of an artwork that there has to be an interpretation'⁵⁵ on one hand and, on the other, because between the actors and the audience, as Jacques Rancière argues, always exists a third factor determining the theatrical event (a text, an idea, a sentimental disposition), the meaning of which is not known to anyone resulting that the meeting of actors and spectators is not linear, but dynamic. No-one after this meeting is the same, no primary meaning remains identical. The spectator that constitutes one of the *sine qua non* conditions of the theatrical relation is rightly considered today as co-creator or re-creator, as Castoriadis would argue,⁵⁶ of a performance, an interpretation or in general of a theatrical event. And this re-creation is interwoven with the representations that are formed in the conscience of the spectators during the theatrical representation.⁵⁷

Nevertheless these representations are also located on stage, in the thoughts and the experiences of the actors who either embody roles or simply perform some actions; they always start from some images that inhabit their thoughts or feelings. Therefore, the theatrical relation evolves as a perpetual game of images and meanings, as well as on stage and off stage, by actors and spectators, a mutual game of image making meanings and signification of images, in which it would be absolute absurd to isolate the meaning or the image. As "there is no thought without representations,"⁵⁸ there is no representation without thought. The absolutely "physical" or "corporeal" or "iconical" or "pure"

54 Pefanis, G.P. (2012). *Το θέατρο και τα σύμβολα. Διαδικασίες συμβόλισης του δραματικού λόγου*, (*The Theatre and the Symbols. Symbolisation's Processes of Dramatic Discourse*). Athens: Papazisis.

55 Danto, A.C. (1981). *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art*. p. 124. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press. Also Pefanis, G.P. (2007). p. 24.

56 Castoriadis, C. (1993). pp. 70–71. (2000). p. 85.

57 Rancière, J. (2008). *Le spectateur émancipé*. p. 19. Paris: La Fabrique.

58 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 329.

theatre is nothing but a strong abstraction which in case we take it to the letter, it will lead us to paralogism exactly as the absolutely 'intellectual' theatre. It is impossible to discern the representations of the thought from thought itself as it is impossible to discern quite well the representations of the actors and the spectators from the theatrical relation that connects them and which is born inside and thanks to each individual theatrical performance. That is why, an authentic performance, as well as the representation of thought, (*Vorstellung*), "is not re-presentation (*Vertretung*), it is not there for something else or in place of something else,"⁵⁹ but it is an autonomous propelling of that other, a creative action of conscience that is projected in the future selfsame and it is born inside and by that other: the past, tradition, "reality". *Ex nixilo, not cum nihilo, nor in nihilo*.

In other words, the performance is not *produced* by something that precedes it, like the consequence from its cause. As many theoretical approaches, which mainly originate from Antonin Artaud, point out, the theatrical performance is not a representation of reality;⁶⁰ it is not a reproduction of a former object. On the contrary, thanks to its transforming and transfiguring power, which is expressed between actors and spectators, it can produce new individual experiences and new collective situations itself.⁶¹ Within this framework and as much as possible, a reduction of the referential/mimetic function in favor of the performative function is sought,⁶² as well as the creation of an 'energetic' theatre, according to Jean-François Lyotard, that will produce discontinuous events, according to which the conformity of the scenic arts would be substituted by the independence and the synchrony of the sounds, words, corporal forms and images, (as is the case of Cage's, Cunningham's or Rauschenberg's co-productions), in such a way that insinuations or express references are not evoked but only unintentional tensions⁶³ or non-representable ideas.⁶⁴

59 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 329.

60 Sarrazac Jean-Pierre, (2001) *Critique du théâtre. De l'utopie au désenchantement*. Belfort: Circé, p. 63; (2007) "La reprise. (Réponse au postdramatique)". *Études théâtrales* 38–39: 7–18.

61 On this point see Erika Fischer-Lichte Fischer-Lichte Erika (2001) *Theatralität und die Krisen der Repräsentation*. Stuttgart: Metzler; (2008) *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*. London & New York: Routledge.

62 In the concept of Jean Alter (1990) *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

63 Lyotard, J.P. (1994). "La dent, la paume." pp. 97–98. In *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*. pp. 91–98. Paris: Galilée. See Lyotard Jean-François, (1984) *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; (1990) *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*. Paris: Galilée; (1994) "La dent, la paume", in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*. Paris: Galilée, 91–98.

64 Lyotard, J.P. (1988) p. 21.

However, according to Castoriadis, all that could not happen in default of language and the significations that it bears. To the prospective argument supporting that the dramatic language has past exhausted its expressive limits and that, as Lehmann would set it forth, it describes a past image of the personal and social conflicts,⁶⁵ he would object on the one hand that “the idea of the possibility of a complete analysis of linguistic expressions is equivalent to positing that absolute knowledge exists”⁶⁶ and on the other hand, that the personal and social conflicts are based at first on the social significations and therefore on the language by means of which they are articulated. Since the expressiveness of the language is not finite, it is entailed that the significations that are formed by means of this language do not have an end and accordingly the significations of the dramatic language should be irreducible and should not be de facto engaged in past images. The fact that this happens quite often does not mean that in general the performances that are based on the dramatic language are past saturated and dysfunctional or that the postmodern societies could not and should not wish to allow a complex and profound representation of their conflicts.⁶⁷ The dramatic conflicts, the dialogue, the representation of fictional characters, all these characteristics of the dramatic theatre are interwoven with the philosophical thought itself and the images-meanings that it produces; therefore they do not simply double something that already exists in the imagination of a writer nor do they establish a hierarchical relation having this writer as foremost but they constitute fields of quest and research, wondering, contestation and self-contestation, transformation of mental objects to socio-historical objects,⁶⁸ namely, fields of creation.

Lehmann's postdramatic model⁶⁹ that describes a strong tendency of the modern theatre can become accepted as a supply of remarks, arguments and ideas but not as a uniform theory that categorizes per topic some change of paradigm and confirms a section of historical and aesthetical order that supposedly introduces us to the post drama era. Moreover, this section has been contested the past few years by many sides,⁷⁰ not only because it reduces the symbolic field, therefore the critical impact, too, to the spectators of the theatre

65 Lehmann Hans-Thies, (2002) *Le théâtre postdramatique*. Paris: L'Arche, p. 287.

66 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 352.

67 Lehmann. H.T. (2002). p. 287.

68 About this process of transformation see Castoriadis (1987: 312–313).

69 For a detailed criticism to this model see Pefanis (2007a: 247–317).

70 See for example Biet Christian-Christophe Triaud, (2006) *Qu'est-ce que le théâtre?* Paris: Gallimard; Ryngaert Jean-Pierre, (2000) “Présentation”, *Études théâtrales* 24–25: 7–10; Triffaux Jean-Pierre, (2008) “Le comédien à l'ère numérique”, *Communications* 83: 193–210; Sarrazac (2007: 7–18).

and paves the path to extreme forms of individuality,⁷¹ but because it presents important gaps in its rational structure as if it is taken to the letter, the theory of post-dramatic turn leads to a flagrant error of circular argument: it presupposes that what it ought to prove, namely the retreat or even the withdrawal of the dramatic speech, something that is not consistent with the empirical facts of special festivals or meetings, of the continuous appearance of new playwrights, of the satisfactory presentations of their plays on stages and the relevant publishing activity in many European countries.⁷²

It seems that the problem should be approached in a different way: we constantly talk about revolutions in art, maybe because we do not talk anymore about revolutions in our social life. And we love the changes of paradigms in the scientific or artistic proceedings perhaps because a deep “change of paradigm” does not occur, having an essential impact on our social lives and our daily routine.

Rhizomes and Magmas

Gilles Deleuze's thought moves toward the same direction, that of the non-representation when, regarding the ‘theatre of recurrence’, refers to a pure power, to a language that speaks before the words, to gestures before the organized bodies, to masks before the faces and to visions and phantoms before the dramatic characters.⁷³ Castoriadis' thought could possibly meet with Deleuze's thought, if the theory on creation of the first was combined with the theory of the latter and that of Félix Guattari about rhizomes⁷⁴ and the becoming as an infinite flow through deterritorialised fields.⁷⁵ The meaning of rhizomes refers to a concept of a world with conditions of correlations and heterogeneity during which the systems of individual entities or nodes are abandoned and non-hierarchical relations of multiple narratives without origin or central root to serve at the source of these relations, with free flows of desires,

71 Roques-Vigarelo, S.G. (2008). “Enjeux et limites des performances”, *Communications* 83: 169–179.

72 Ryngaert, J.P. 2002: pp. 7–8. Also in Wallon, E. (2006) “Postface. Le théâtre en ses dehors.” pp. 939–943. In Christian Biet-Christophe Triau: *Qu'est-ce que le théâtre?* pp. 931–983. Paris: Gallimard.

73 Deleuze, G. (1989). *Différence et répétition*, p. 19. Paris: P.U.F.

74 Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1980) *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie, tome 2: Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Minuit.

75 Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1981). *Αντι-Οιδίπους. Καπιταλισμός και σχιζοφρένεια*. (Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia). Athens: Rappas.

meanings and forms in an eccentric non uniform becoming are sought. This anti-essentialistic sight, which is contrary to every kind of determinism and has an important impact to the theory and practice of postmodern performances,⁷⁶ could be associated, in some points of view, with Castoriadis' theory about the creation of significations, radical imagination and magmatic flow, but only under the condition that the differences are discerned and kept between them, in particular as far as it concerns the sedimentary origins of the Castoridean becoming, the presence of the necessary conditions for the creation of imaginary magmas and of course the significance that is attributed to the process of significations' institution. As it is obvious, the forces of the centre, the past institution and the present orderliness that for Deleuze-Guattari are fully disengaged from the free flows of desires and forms, for Castoriadis would simply lead to multiple forms of subjective empiricism or even of skepticism.

That becomes clear on the level of the theatrical stage. The rhizomatic thought finds an open field of application in the postmodern performances, of a Carmelo Bene for example or a François Tanguy, (the Théâtre du Radeau of the latter, from the '90s and hence could be considered as a deleuzean stage), where the radical and subversive scenic figures, the tensions and the procedures at the expense of the results and the integrated morphemes and the extreme detachment of the actions from the texts or the actors from the fictional characters are outbid.⁷⁷

On the contrary, the magmatic thought, although it would consider the performance as a potential creation of new significations and figures, which it cannot be explained by earlier historical and social causes, it would not isolate it from the historical and social context under any circumstances. According to Castoriadis, a performance, since it is authentic, is a creation of imaginary significations and figures, but these have no meaning without the social imaginary from the 'legein' and 'teuchain' [speaking and action] of a given society. Performance is not reducible to anterior parameters, but it also does not

76 See suggestively Ashline William L. (2002) "Clicky Aesthetics: Deleuze, Headphonics, and the Minimalist Assemblage of 'Aberrations'", *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture and Politics* 15/1: 87–101; Bottoms Stephen J. (1998) "The Tangled Flora of Goat Island: Rhizome, Repetition, Reality", *Theatre Journal* 50/4: 421–446; Fenske Mindy, (2006). "The Movement of Interpretation: Conceptualizing Performative Encounters with Multimediatic Performance", *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26/2: 138–161; Fortier Mark (1996) "Shakespeare as 'Minor Theater': Deleuze and Guattari and the Aims of Adaption", *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 29/1: 1–18.

77 Little surprise, then, that Deleuze has chosen Carmelo Bene's art in order to write his most "theatrical" text: "Un manifeste de moins". See Bene Carmelo-Gilles Deleuze, (1979) *Superpositions*. Paris: Minuit, 85–131.

constitute a random event, an orphan action. Thought is involved in every creation and in every thought there is involved an incontestable but improvable affirmation of the world, within which the thought and the creation originate, as well as the creative thought and the thought of creation. "We are capable of thinking only by positing together these indubitable and undemonstrable statements: there is a world, there is psyche, there is a society, and there is signification. And this path is the path of philosophy and of the only true science, thoughtful science."⁷⁸ In this point of view, the disguise and the representation, as two essential features of dramatic or literary theatre, do not constitute simple repetitions of an anterior text, but quests and creations of another ontological order within the frame of the socio-historical and corporal-mental as the subject is not simply doubled, but elucidates himself through the other, in whom is transformed and whom it represents, by changing in the present and recreating for the future its meaningful images. In this view, "there is no final meaning or final interpretation in theatrical production"⁷⁹ and Castoriadis stands closer to Alain Badiou, who argues that "every dramatic text is latent to itself. It resides in the incompleteness of its meaning. It is resuscitated and accomplished in every representation."⁸⁰ It is accomplished and regenerated in every representation because the incompleteness of its meaning is not revoked and is actuated within the flux of historic time, to give birth to new meanings.

Returning to the Social Projects

Castoriadis enters the contemporary theoretical discussion on theatre through his general aesthetic mindsets on the work of art, its emergence out of the imaginary meanings of society and its connection with the philosophical orientation and education of the same society. A work of art, a theatre performance in particular, does not reproduce the real doesn't merely re-present the empirical world. It is form of art that is at the same time the form of the Chaos and the form that Chaos envisages; it a gateway, an open window to the Abyss. It is this articulation of Chaos that constitutes the *catharsis* of art.⁸¹

78 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 338.

79 Constantinidis, S.E. (1993). *Theatre Under Deconstruction? A Question of Approach*. p. 293. New York & London: Garland.

80 Badiou Alain, (1988) *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre. Court traité philosophique*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, p. 69.

81 Castoriadis, C. (2007). pp. 146–152.

Castoriadis believes in the artistic canon, he trusts the all-time value of great art, from which he derives the axiological criteria in order to interpret and evaluate contemporary artworks. But these values derive from within the Being, so Castoriadis's views on art place artworks within the historical flow and the social field of the emergence of the imaginary meanings.

Hence, the cultural creation is interwoven with all the creation of significations and inalienable both from the historic time and social transformation and the ability of a society to contest and be self-contested. "Among the creations of human history, one is singularly singular: the one that permits the society under consideration to itself call itself into question. This is the creation of the idea of autonomy, of the reflective return upon oneself, of criticism and self-criticism, of a questioning that neither knows nor accepts any limit. This creation therefore takes place at the same time as democracy and philosophy. For, just as a philosopher cannot accept any external limitations on his thought, so democracy recognizes no external limits to its instituting power; the sole limits result from its self-limitation".⁸² The autonomous societies call their own institution into question, their own central imaginary significations, and the representation that they constitute for the world and life, as Sophocles' *Antigone* shows us in an excellent way.⁸³ What does "call into question" mean? What else from that through these institutions, significations and representations they create the other, a theatrical scene where they can treat the otherness, that phantasm of their self that allows them to come out of themselves and imagine him as another?

In this point of view, his position on modern art and in particular on modern theatre would be considered as rigid or pessimistic by some and critical and discerning by others. He believes that geniuses no longer exist and that these are fabricated by the journalists per trimester: "when an era has no great men, it invents them;" he concludes that modern stage direction, a mixture of provincialism and presumptuous arrogance skillfully copies the great stage directors of the European historic avant-garde such as Meyerhold, Reinhardt or Piscator; he talks about an over-civilized and artistically neo-illiterate public, which consumes imitations and ersatzes as digestible goods, these derogations of the original modern art "that is already three quarters of a century old."⁸⁴

The shrinkage and the counterfeiting of the creativity could not but keep step with the lack of the authentic critique: fabrication of factitious geniuses, invention of "modernist" trends, theoretical alibi for supposedly changes of

82 Castoriadis, C. (2000). p. 136.

83 Castoriadis, C. (1993). pp. 11–32. (2008). pp. 212–220.

84 Castoriadis, C. (2007). p. 20.

paradigms and revolutionary techniques and styles that have become advertising slogans⁸⁵ and, above all, promotion of sales and artificial renewal of the consumers' interest. The absence of every personal judgment, the cowardice of disapproval and the lethargy of the living past have become the main professional specialization of the critics. "The profession of the modern critic", he points out sarcastically, "is identical to the profession of the stockbroker that Keynes defined so successfully: he guesses what the average common opinion thinks that the average common opinion will think."⁸⁶

The decline of contemporary art as expressed by the gradual death of forms and *eide*, by the replacement of artworks by products, of theatre performances by meaningless events, or of the true creators by the "artists" cannot be irrelevant to the collapse of theoretical thought, to its confinement in university networks and financial dependencies, to its auto referential obsession with novelty and pseudo-radical changes. Novelty soon becomes emptiness, radicalism veils repetition, shallowness and banality. All these elements constitute for Castoriadis a "reverse academicism"⁸⁷ or an "anti-academicism" that is synonymous with the cult of the void form, of the arid speech, of the insignificant action, of the programmatically death-persuasive declaration of the end, as well as the programmatically melancholic imposition of the "post", when in both cases the "before", the tradition, the past, the historical deposit have been suppressed or exhausted and cancelled indirectly.

However, theory is not what it lays on the ensemble of the scenic creation and the theatrical relation in general in a deferred time, but it is inherent in this relation because it constitutes an organic part of the human universe that we call 'praxis'. Theory as such is a "prattein" (to do), a particular and uncertain "prattein", interwoven with the project of the world's elucidation.⁸⁸ Without this project, theory is reduced, to the best of the cases, to absurdities of a fruitless eruditeness while in the worst of the cases it is transformed to a defender of the artistic retailing, offering a coat of importance to the commercialization of the art that the modern liberal oligarchies attempt even more consistently. Castoriadis' thought urges us to return to that project and, through the theatrical relation, try to create new projects.

85 Castoriadis, C. (2000). p. 117.

86 Castoriadis, C. (2007). p. 22.

87 Castoriadis, C. (2007). pp. 30, 37.

88 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 74. Pefanis, G.P. (2007b). p. 28.

Bureaucratic Capitalism and the Work of Cornelius Castoriadis

Peter Murphy

Across forty years from the 1950s to 1990s, Cornelius Castoriadis developed a critique of bureaucratic capitalism. The article looks at the strengths and weaknesses of Castoriadis' theory. The weaknesses stem from Castoriadis' economic theory; the strengths from his theory of meaning. Castoriadis' attempt to link a critique of growth to the critique of bureaucracy fails but his analysis of the tenuousness of meaning in modern bureaucratic societies is much more successful. Bureaucratization causes the draining of meaning (imaginary significations) from societies dominated by public and private bureaucracies. Superficiality, incoherence and sterility triumph over sense. Societies become consumed by hobbies and lobbies, and foist a huge amount of junk on their denizens. Junk science, junk art, junk politics, junk culture and junk everything proliferates. Everywhere one turns trivial pursuits prevail.

Cornelius Castoriadis was a leftist. Throughout his life, he identified with left-wing causes. He began youthful political life as a Communist-turned-Trotskyist. In exile, in France, he moved to a kind of independent leftism that began with a trenchant critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's apologetics for Communism and mutated into a vision of a non-bureaucratic self-managed society. For a time, Castoriadis thought of the benchmark society as 'socialism' but he eventually stopped using that term and opted to talk instead about an 'autonomous society'. It was never entirely clear what Castoriadis meant by autonomy. He didn't quite mean the autonomous individual of John Stuart Mill's liberal society. His concept of autonomy referred more to a society than an individual. An autonomous society was one capable of self-critique. It contained individuals who were capable of criticizing the society they were members of. An autonomous society was one that could re-invent itself in a deep-going way with new laws and practices.

That was very much the left-wing Castoriadis. But there is another Castoriadis, one who is less obvious but also less obviously a left-winger. There are several threads in Castoriadis's thought that have a right-wing resonance. For one thing, Castoriadis thought of autonomy not only in terms of critique,

which is a left-wing platitude, but also in terms of creation which has much wider and more interesting significance. Since Schumpeter, many conservatives have strongly identified with capitalism's process of creative destruction.¹ Furthermore, Castoriadis identified the well-spring of creativity with the West, hardly a standard left-wing nostrum. He thought (correctly) that autonomous societies were a function of the Greco-Western tradition. He understood very clearly that the larger part of high-level human creation, not least the arts and sciences, were produced by a relatively small band of Western societies. He attributed that to their relative autonomy. They encouraged (at their peak) critical people who not only questioned the laws of society (as well as the laws of science and the laws of art) but who also possessed a love of creation—an *eros* of making, innovating, and bringing-into-being.

Contra-wise, Castoriadis was no fan of Third World politics.² While anti-colonial third-world-ism became popular in the 1960s and 1970s, Castoriadis kept a skeptical distance from it. This was a movement that he knew could only end in tears. He was not wrong. Castoriadis was also a defender of the institution of the family.³ He expressed a deeply skeptical view of feminism.⁴

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- 1 Deidre McCloskey in *Bourgeois Dignity* (2010) proposes that around 1700 a decisive shift occurred in north-western Europe in favor of innovation, setting in train a history of scientific, technical, mercantile and finally (and decisively) industrial discovery and application that permanently changed the nature of economics. McCloskey, D. (2010). *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 - 2 'The only cases where we could speak genuinely of "disorder" are, I think, those of "old systems that are in crisis" or "crumbling". So, for instance, with the late Roman World—or many Third World societies today. In the first case, a new "unifying principle", a new magma of social imaginary significations, eventually emerged with Christianity . . . In the second case, that of Third World countries, no new "unifying principle" seems to emerge . . .' See Castoriadis, C. (1987). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 'The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain', and Castoriadis, C. (1997). *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. p. 16.
 - 3 'The crisis of the family today does not consist only, and not so much, in its statistical fragility. What is at issue is the crumbling and disintegration of the traditional roles—man, woman, parents, children—and the consequences thereof: the *formless disorientation* of new generations.' Yes, agreed Castoriadis, there were moments of legitimate emancipation in the undoing of traditional roles. 'But the ambiguities of its effects have long been noted. The more time passes, the more one is justified in asking oneself whether this process is expressed more by a blossoming forth of new ways of living than by sheer disorientation and anomie.' See 'The Crisis of Western Societies' [1982], *The Castoriadis Reader* (1997), Oxford: Blackwell, p. 259.
 - 4 'No doubt, heteronomous societies have created immortal works—or, quite simply, a countless host of beautiful objects. And already, this statement shows—from a democratic perspective, as a matter of fact—the untenability of the historical proscriptions today's new

Finally, there is the testy matter of capitalism. In some ways, Castoriadis was a conventional leftist. This was true of his view of capitalism: *capitalism is bad*. He started out with the notion that capitalism is bad because it generates alienation. Later he thought it was bad because it lacked an internal limit. Capitalist economies grow. Economic growth is the most powerful legitimating force of capitalist societies. Growth equals prosperity equals legitimacy. What is not to like about that? In the past two hundred years, capitalism has improved the living standard of many societies 15–20 times over. It has lifted five out of the six billion of the world's population out of a fate that previously had caused almost everyone to live on \$2 a day or less. Most twentieth-century intellectuals ignored the power of that achievement. Castoriadis did too. He took the view that growth lacked limits. Whatever lacks a limit, a *peras*, will end in grief. Growth is a kind of ancient Greek tragedy. It is hubris de-personified. The person with hubris knows not when to stop. That was the lesson of ancient drama. Christianity made roughly the same point. Pride was the cause of human downfall. Those who are proud do not see what is in front of them. Pride blinds and terrible mistakes follow. The same, Castoriadis reasoned, applied to society.

Capitalism is often equated with greed. Greed is a variation on the flaw of hubris and the sin of pride. The greedy person doesn't know when to stop eating or accumulating money. There is never enough. Castoriadis's view of capitalism as an economic system without an internal limit suggested it was an impersonal version of greed. Capitalism's excess would lead to its own extinction. But the caricature of capitalism as the plaything of fat cats and bloated plutocrats has never been convincing. In fact, it is not true that capitalism lacks an internal limit. Conventional leftism, represented by Karl Marx, supposed that capitalism expanded until it fell into crisis and that crisis would lead to Communism. Castoriadis, however, was very skeptical of Marx. For a decade Castoriadis worked as a professional economist in the OECD in Paris. At the same time, he produced an extensive critique of Marx's economics. Critique is probably the right word. For although Castoriadis criticized Marx, he also carried over certain assumptions from Marx, principally that growth was a linear (progressive or regressive) phenomenon. Things grew larger, problems accumulated, capitalism experienced crisis. The history of both the nineteenth

fanatics want to issue concerning cultural matters. Following the logic of certain feminists, for example, I ought to cast out the *Passion According to Saint John* not only because it was composed by a dead and white male but because it gives expression to a religious faith that, in my own view, is alienating.' See 'Culture in a Democratic Society' [1994] in *The Castoriadis Reader* (1997), p. 341.

and twentieth century suggested this was in part true but that capitalism was, in fact, not linear but cyclical. One of the three greatest economists of the twentieth century, Joseph Schumpeter, made cycles central to his economics.⁵ Cyclical analysis supposes that capitalism expands and contracts and expands and contracts and expands and so on. As such, it has limits built into it. In this respect, it functions a bit like a diaphragm. It expands and reaches a limit and contracts and reaches a limit and expands and reaches a limit and so on.

It was not only nineteenth-century liberals who were captivated by the Enlightenment idea of progress; so were most socialists. Yet despite the entrenchment of the notion of progress, much about modern societies does not move in straight lines but rather in loops. The ring, the circle, the old-fashioned revolving revolution, the cyclical rotation—all of these notions better describe certain aspects of modern capitalist societies than does the idea that society or its sub-systems are linear, additive or cumulative in whatever direction one might imagine, be it forwards, backwards, up or down. In an economic cycle, what is going down is already latently preparing for the path upwards. That is not to say that in a modern society, there are no long-term linear phenomena to be observed. Over two hundred plus years of modern industrial capitalism, successful capitalist societies have over the long course trended upwards in real wealth per capita. Yet that broadly linear development has been ironically progressed by cyclical mechanisms, one of whose functions is to destroy outmoded types of wealth and wealth creation. The modern dynamic loop or cycle is, in fact, also a spiral. Creative destruction is the internal limit of creative expansion. Yet it is also the condition of the possibility of further, greater and better creation. Each step forward thus requires a partial step back. Each looping, spiraling partial step backwards is also a trigger for a spiraling loop whose down-slope is simultaneously an up-slope. Figuratively speaking, the modern capitalist imaginary is an Escher-like image. You may think you are going in one direction; but actually you are going in the other direction. Or rather you are going in both directions at the same time. Naturally this makes economic forecasting, among other things, difficult.

The ambidextrous logic of capitalism means that Castoriadis was right to question modern rationalism even if he was wrong to suggest that modern capitalism was a function of modern rationalism and that the periodic crises of capitalism betrayed the pseudo-rationality of modern reason. He had two criticisms of rationalism. One, the most important, was that you cannot explain the imagination—and thus all forms of human invention—on the

5 Schumpeter, J. (1939). *Business Cycles: A Theoretical, Historical, and Statistical Analysis of the Capitalist Process. Volumes 1 and 2*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

basis of reason alone. This is true. Castoriadis developed this proposition in his earliest writings from the 1940s, in his commentary on Max Weber. Like most intellectuals of the time, Castoriadis spent a lot of time commenting on Karl Marx in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet his more important if often implicit interlocutor was Weber. He rightly intuited that Weber was a much more significant thinker than Marx. Castoriadis took issue with Weber's view from the early 20th century that the success of modern societies could be explained by the process of rationalization. Reason applied to social processes made them more functional and thus more productive. Castoriadis countered that each society has its form of reason that is posited by that society's collective imagination. Thus the imagination of a certain kind of modern society had discovered how to rationalize. This type of society was capitalist and imbued with a work ethic, most commonly a Protestant work ethic. Off-shoots from such societies spun outwards from North-western Europe after the era of the Renaissance. The rationalizing form of reason, which was demonstrably a modern form of reason, had powerful social applications in industries, markets and more generally in modern institutions. Castoriadis insisted though that rationalization also had its negatives.

The first of these negatives was that the reason of rationalization obscured the function of the collective imagination. This was part of a larger criticism that Castoriadis repeated many times: namely that most societies, both modern and traditional, occluded imagination in favor some kind of social power, be it ritual or reason that drugged the imagination and put it to sleep. In a way, Castoriadis was right. The driving force of modern industrial capitalist societies is the imagination. It produces very high levels of innovation and invention. The national income of many societies is as much as 20 times higher in real terms than it was two hundred years ago. There is no precedent for this in history. Life expectancy, housing, education, disposable income, transport and comfort levels have risen multiple times in these societies. To do this, these societies unleashed an avalanche of innovation. Moreover, and possibly more crucially, they set in train an expectation of perpetual innovation. Time and again they raised productivity and increased efficiency. Sometimes this was done by rationalization but the greatest developments happened by acts of imagination. They created new products and processes, new technologies and aesthetics. Castoriadis does not link creativity and productivity but he does foreground the act of creation. He does see it as socially central. He may disparage growth but he also theorizes its engine. He might not have Schumpeter's sense of how much modern industrial capitalism relies on creation but even more than Schumpeter he locates creation at the heart of the modern social drama.

The second of the negatives that Castoriadis raised concerning rationalization was more ambivalent. He suggested that modern societies equated reason with rationalization, rationalization with development, development with growth, and growth with numeric size. From that long chain, a tacit formula emerges that equates bigger with better and better with more.⁶ One has to be cautious with this second criticism. Sometimes it is true that more is not better. It perfectly correct, as Castoriadis argued, that more scientific publications or more people with PhDs is not ipso facto better. Yet, sometimes, more *is* better. If a population increases, then economic growth to produce more jobs to meet that population increase is better than not having economic growth. There is an irony lurking here. The Weberian ethic—the Protestant ethic—assumed that less is more. By being more austere, by trimming waste, cutting slack, reducing expenditure, a company and an economy could grow. Austerity led to riches. Many left-wing critics of rationalization criticized riches in the name of an austere view of the world. They responded to Protestant asceticism with their own brand of asceticism. The Weberian capitalist was ascetic in order to paradoxically produce wealth, a non-ascetic condition. The radical anti-capitalist criticized wealth produced by development and growth on the basis that it offended their ascetic sensibility. Castoriadis was more nuanced than this, though. There is a streak of left-wing asceticism in him, the negative theology of a Marx who denounced the Moses of accumulation. But he mixes this, or over-determines it, with the view that expansion is hubris. It betrays a deluded human sense of omnipotence, of the human God-like ambition for infinity, infinite possibility, and unlimited acquisition. What makes human beings human is a sense of limits. We cannot grow something infinitely. An economic boom will not last forever. The growth of any company is not unlimited. The wealth of any individual will not expand forever. The richest person today will not be the richest person tomorrow. Our knowledge of anything does not progress infinitely. We cannot know everything about ourselves or others. The world around us is not completely transparent. Our society and our morals are not perfect. Human beings are not perfectible. We are not gods. Our society is not transcendent. Our domination of nature is not absolute.⁷ That means,

6 Castoriadis, C. (1976). 'Reflections on "Rationality" and "Development"'; (1991), *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy. Essays on Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 143–174.

7 Which led the conservative Castoriadis to comment: 'Let us put aside that which is perhaps the most important aspect of the pill, the psychical aspect, of which nobody talks: What might happen to human beings should they begin to see themselves as absolute masters over the decision to bequeath or not bequeath life, without having to pay a thing for this "power" (beyond two dollars a month)'. And now not even two dollars a month: the 2012

as Castoriadis reasonably insisted, that no society can grow indefinitely.⁸ But that also—ironically—is the essence of capitalism. For capitalism is cyclical. It is ambidextrous. It supposes that what grows shrinks. But also that shrinkage presages growth. What is interesting about capitalism is not growth or shrinkage but the super-position of the two. Shrinkage is the limit of growth that is also the precursor of growth.

One can read the Weberian Protestant ethic in these terms, but it is not necessary to do so. Unsurprisingly, when Weber and Schumpeter met, they argued.⁹ Presumably this was partly a function of ego. But equally it was a function of world view. As Castoriadis understood, and here his insight really shines and far exceeds the usual left-wing mumble, the Weberian Protestant ethic represents not just the driver of capitalism or its productive limit; it is also (in one late-appearing version) a negation of capitalism and creation. It is easy to understand, in no small measure thanks to Max Weber, how the relatively austere nature of Protestantism explains the mountainous riches of modern

us Democratic Party and its marquee fool, Sandra Fluke, demanded that employers with religious affiliations offer health insurance plans that provide free birth control. A graduate of Cornell gender studies and Georgetown law, Fluke's views are a clear sign of an asinine political elite that not only retails frivolities as policy—and would therefore like to exclude reasonable conscience-exceptions out of some kind of over-wrought kitsch moralizing absolutism—but that can no longer grasp the larger implications of what its foot-stamping demands. Fluke is a classic political ladder-climber in a bureaucratic society. By the age of 31, she had co-founded the New York Statewide Coalition for Fair Access to Family Court, was a member of the Manhattan Borough President's Taskforce on Domestic Violence and multiple other New York City and New York State coalitions, the recipient of a Women Lawyers of Los Angeles' Fran Kandel Public Interest Grant, and had served as president of the Georgetown Law Students for Reproductive Justice. Bureaucratic societies dress up such political careerism in the garb of the needy, the vulnerable and the afflicted. This is done in a manner that is both cynical and naive at the same time. The presumed public good of such careers is in reality just one long tedious addition to the curriculum vitae—itself an ever-evolving, ever-expanding tool of self-promotion in bureaucratic societies. In these societies, and in loathsome ways, activism readily turns into a career and such careers, reliant as they invariably are on the public purse, are no more and no less a vehicle for redistributing money from the poor to the gilded ultra-affluent upper middle classes for whom anything like real work is an offense against their humanity. See Castoriadis, 'Reflections on "Rationality" and "Development"', *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (1991), p. 194.

8 Castoriadis, C. (1976). 'Reflections on "Rationality" and "Development"'; (1991), *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* p. 186.

9 They argued about Marxism and Bolshevism. See McCraw Thomas K. (2007). *Prophet of Innovation: Joseph Schumpeter and Creative Destruction*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. p. 94.

capitalism, especially when the Protestant ethic was translated and refigured in the American context. Even if the Renaissance invented double-entry book-keeping, Protestant religious budgeting amplified and elucidated capitalist economic budgeting. It subtly encouraged individuals and companies to do more with less. Christianity is a religion of paradox.¹⁰ The paradox of religious budgeting lent the modern economic concept of productivity its essence and its power. Productivity is a function of the paradox that less is more. It is an exceptionally potent driver of modern economies. At the same time, every improvement in productivity in a modern economy eventually exhausts itself. What is today's innovation is tomorrow's norm. So that the 'less' that produces 'more' (eventually) produces 'less'. And so the cycle goes, on and on. But significantly, as Castoriadis observed in writings in the 1950s and 1960s, rationalization also produces another non-productive kind of capitalism—*bureaucratic capitalism*—that far from driving the cycle of growth-shrinkage-growth leads to a slow asphyxiation and self-cannibalization of capitalism as a productive system and the emergence of multiple parasitic classes and parasitic offices and processes within modern societies.¹¹

Before examining the phenomenon of bureaucratic capitalism more closely, some political context is important. I noted previously that Castoriadis began political life as a Trotskyist. This is not just a curiosity. There was a generation or two of twentieth-century thinkers who, like Castoriadis, at the start of their political lives had brief spells as Trotskyists and then moved on—many of them to become standard-bearers of the intellectual and political right. A good portion of the first generation of American neo-conservatives falls into this category.¹² Why is this important? Trotsky was one of an endless stream

10 This was brilliantly and repeatedly argued by G.K. Chesterton, one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century. On the paradoxical foundation of Christianity, see for example Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (2007 [1925]). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

11 Castoriadis, C. (1960–1961). 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution'. In (1988). *Political and Social Writings. Volume 2 1955–1960*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 271.

12 Many neo-conservative intellectuals began life as American Trotskyists. These figures had taken seriously the Trotskyist opposition to the entropic Soviet Union, so much so that by the 1970s and 1980s they were embracing the idea of a strong American military capable of defeating the Soviets. They subsequently applied similar notions to reversing the entropic slide of states in the Middle East. One of the initial points of intersection and crystallisation of these forces was the Trotskyist organizer Max Schachtman. His first step on a path that would take many intellectuals from American Trotskyism to neo-conservatism was to leave the Socialist Workers Party in 1940. He steadily moved across the political spectrum toward the distinctive brand of American anti-communist Social Democracy. Other key figures included Schachtman-ally James Burnham, Burnham's

of tyrannical and authoritarian figures that Russian politics produced—and has continued to produce to this day. The thing that made him odd though was not that he was purged by Stalin but that he lived long enough to create a critique of Stalin that had one interesting characteristic. It charged that Stalin ruined the Russian Revolution by creating a parasitic bureaucratic caste personified by the dictator. Most who passed quickly through Trotskyism grasped that Trotsky had the same tyrannical traits as Stalin and realized that the Russian Revolution was a tyranny from day one. However, they saw some validity in the theory of the parasitic bureaucratic caste. This theory helped

friend the philosopher Sidney Hook, Irving Kristol (who was a Shermanite—see below), Michael Harrington (a Schachtmanite till the 1970s), Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Albert Wohlstetter, and the Schachtmanite aides to the influential US Democratic Senator Henry Jackson (such as Elliot Abrams), and so on. Kirkpatrick, the Reagan-era Ambassador to the United Nations, was a member of the Schachtmanite Young People's Socialist League and later joined Schachtman's Social Democrats, USA at whose conferences Paul Wolfowitz, later US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence in the George W. Bush administration, spoke in the 1970s. Kirkpatrick did her PhD. under Franz Neumann, the Frankfurt School Social Democrat. Albert Wohlstetter, a Schachtmanite in the 1940s, was a very important nuclear weapons strategist, Paul Wolfowitz's PhD. supervisor and mentor of Richard Perle. Henry Jackson employed Wolfowitz and Perle as advisors in his office in the 1970s, along with Abram Shulsky, a student of Leo Strauss. Others who moved in the Social Democrat USA milieu included labor leaders George Meany, Albert Shanker and Lane Kirkland, Paul Nitze, Eugene Rostow, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Max Kampelman, Richard Pipes, Seymour Martin Lipset, Bayard Rustin, and Norman Podhoretz. Another key figure, "Sherman", was the non-de-plume of the Berkeley sociologist Philip Selznick, who was in venerable Trotskyist sectarian style an ex-member and factional dissenter from Max Shachtman's Workers Party. Sherman's supporters included Gertrude Himmelfarb, Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Diamond, Herbert Garfinkel, and Irving Kristol. More recent effects of the intersection between Trotskyism and American foreign policy is powerfully evident in the works of the left Social Democratic critic of Islamist terror Paul Berman (an admirer of another dissenting Trotskyist, C.R.L. James), Stephen Schwartz (a neo-conservative critic of the Saudi regime and also a one-time Trotskyist), and not least of all the journalist Christopher Hitchens, former Trotskyist and eloquent defender of regime change in Iraq. It should also be noted in passing that the Iraqi Trotskyist Kaan Makiya wrote by far the best book on Saddam's Iraq: *The Republic of Fear*. The complex family tree sketched above and the story of the remarkable assimilation of Trotsky into mainstream American politics has yet to be properly told. Most accounts of the origins of the neo-conservatives go little way towards understanding such curious phenomena as the intersection between quite a few of the ex-Trotskyists and the political philosophy of Leo Strauss (Irving Kristol was an admirer and Martin Diamond became a Straussian) or such uncanny footnotes to history as the fact that Christopher Hitchens was in Washington State to give a Henry Jackson memorial lecture on the day of September 11, 2001.

explain the Soviet-era *nomenklatura*. Some Trotskyists suggested that communist bureaucracies would eventually acquire capitalist traits. This went a long way to explaining the survival of the Communist Party in China, which managed to successfully transition China from a totalitarian command economy in the direction of authoritarian bureaucratic capitalism. Trotskyist intuitions about bureaucratic parasites were also helpful in explaining some of the less-than-healthy characteristics developing in capitalist societies in the twentieth-century West. This was underlined by James Burnham in his 1941 book *The Managerial Revolution*. Burnham was an American Trotskyist apostate who became in short order a *National Review* paleo-conservative.¹³ The essence of his view was that managers were becoming a new ruling class. This extrapolated from what Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means had observed in their 1932 study *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, namely that the ownership and the control of companies were separating. What Berle and Means, and later Burnham, observed was arguably the consequence of the procedural rationality, the processes of rationalization that Weber observed in the early twentieth century. In this moment, the methodical nature of the Protestant ethic was producing not paradox but a kind of suffocating step-by-step process that everyone would soon start to recognize as bureaucratization. As bureaucracy spread in modern organizations, control was substituted for command. Rule was replaced by rules; obedience by compliance; direction by method; and initiative by system. This was the source of the ubiquitous world of paper work, a world in which information could become a technology, a system and a science. In this world, form was replaced by paperwork forms.

Burnham astutely figured out that the supposedly impersonal procedures of managers represented a very personal claim on power.¹⁴ They wanted to rule in place of others while claiming they were doing no such thing. They used rules to rule. The Burnham thesis in turn influenced the neo-conservative

13 Burnham, J. (1960 [1941]). *The Managerial Revolution*. Bloomington. In: University of Indiana Press: Midland Books.

14 'Fusion of the economy with the state, expansion of the state functions to comprise also control of the economy, offers, whether or not the managers individually recognize it, the only available means, on the one hand for making the economic structure workable again after its capitalist breakdown, on the other for putting the managers in the position of the ruling class.' Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (1960 [1941]), p. 127. Burnham's notion that managerial control could reverse the business cycle or replace the profit motive proved not to be true, but the vision of a class set upon shifting the locus of sovereignty from parliamentary assemblies to the administrative bureaus of an expanded state was spot on, as was the prediction of managerial hostility to entrepreneurial capitalism, freedom and initiative.

theory of the new class in the 1960s.¹⁵ Neo-conservative writers in that era observed the rapid expansion of a new imperious class of the tertiary-educated that—streaming out of universities, their heads filled with all sorts of social ideology—began capturing the state, enlarging it, and driving the expansion of unsustainable entitlement programs and all manner of bureaucratic law. They too wished to rule by rules. They proceeded forthwith to make up the rules that others were supposed to live by. This was a project of the political left not of the political right. In the mind of the left, procedural rules equaled the state equaled the public good. The rest was capitalism which was the public bad. Castoriadis never wavered from a nominal identification with the political left. He espoused all the requisite conventional ritual-sounding criticisms of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.¹⁶ Yet for all that he was still an unorthodox type of character. He was savage in his criticism of Soviet tyranny and unstinting in his repudiation of leftists, and that meant most of them, who defended the Soviet Union explicitly or implicitly right until the day it died. Castoriadis also recognized very early on the pathological phenomenon of bureaucratic capitalism. From the late forties to the mid-sixties he was a member of the French intellectual group *Socialism or Barbarism*. This group was persistently critical of the bureaucratization of modern society and it argued at length for a self-managed society that was not reliant on behemoth bureaucracies. Castoriadis had a distinctive frame of mind.

So what—in Castoriadis' view—made bureaucratic capitalism a delinquent phenomenon? Much of his critique reads and feels like the standard left-wing discourse of the time; much of this discourse would become the platitudes of the nineteen seventies. Yet at the same time there is something else in Castoriadis' work, something that transcends the clichés of his time. Both the standard and the non-standard critiques of bureaucratic capitalism are interwoven in his 1960 *Socialism or Barbarism* study 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution'.¹⁷ At that point in time, he observed that bureaucracy had become the logic of contemporary society, its response to everything.¹⁸ He saw bureaucratization in a fairly conventional sense—as the management of activity by hierarchical apparatuses. These had become omnipresent—in production, in the state, in consumption, leisure and scientific research. He offered the left-wing cliché that

15 Kristol Irving, 'The "New Class" Revisited', *Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 1979, p. 24.

16 See, e.g. Castoriadis, C. (1982). 'The Crisis of Western Societies'. In (1997.) *The Castoriadis Reader*. p. 258. Oxford: Blackwell.

17 Castoriadis, C. (1960–1961). 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution'. In (1988). *Political and Social Writings Volume 2*, pp. 271–281.

18 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 272.

bureaucracies manipulate human beings: the apparatuses of sales, advertising, and market research manipulate human needs and that, through the bureaucratization of press and radio and the universities, culture and science had become similarly organized.¹⁹ He alludes (first) to the Berle and Means' theory that owners had been replaced by managers and (second) to the syndicalist theory that bureaucratization had separated the direction of production from its execution.²⁰ What follows from the latter is instrumentalisation. Human beings become a means to the end of production.²¹ Workers are reduced to the position of tool-like executants. This is Marx's theory of alienated labor read through Kantian philosophical categories. Again it was standard fare by the nineteen seventies, and hardly conceptually original in the nineteen fifties. What followed from this, in the eyes of Castoriadis and many others, was the idea that workers who were reduced to taking orders and denied intrinsic satisfaction at work found alternate satisfaction in income and promotion and status distinctions. In the nineteen sixties, a thousand theories of alienation bloomed. All owed something to the early Marx. All said the same thing.

And so did Castoriadis. Yet he also said something different. He offered a view that suggested that bureaucratization was also something other than Kantian-Marxian alienation. It was actually a loss of meaning. Bureaucratization is more than simply the generation of hierarchical apparatuses, or the separation of direction and execution, or the cleavage of ownership and direction, or the turning human beings and their needs into instruments. In fact, truth told, all of those things came before what twentieth-century commentators began to call the bureaucratization of the world. Bureaucratization may or may not be connected with those things that so rattled the cage of the nineteen sixties. But it is also distinct from them. It stands apart from them. For bureaucratization at its core is an inversion of meaning. If all societies require the production of meaning, then bureaucratization can be best understood as the production of nonsense. There are various ways of producing nonsense. Hierarchies, alienation, and instrumentalisation are all capable (to a degree) of producing nonsense. But neither do they or their effects explain the pervasive way in which all aspects of society became subject in the twentieth century to bureaucratic logic, or more precisely to bureaucratic illogic.

The pseudo-logic of the bureaucratic society is tantamount to the emptying out of meaning. It produces vacuity. It is a kind of logic or reason that, as it unfolds, becomes illogical and unreasonable. If logic or reason is supposed to

19 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 272.

20 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 273.

21 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 273.

explain something, then bureaucratic logic makes things, while logical, inexplicable. An explanation is one of the key things by which human beings create meaning. If something does not make sense, then a basic response of all human beings is to ask for an explanation. In a bureaucratized society or institution, you will get an explanation—however the explanation will not make sense. Those who offer the explanation, often members of an apparatus, speak as if an explanation is forthcoming from them and yet manage to say nothing at all or else not anything that other human beings regard as intrinsically meaningful. Twentieth-century societies developed a rich language to describe this impoverished manner of speaking. They learnt to call it spin, verbiage, waffle, gobbledygook, flimflam, guff, blather, drivel, and so on. They learnt to recognize that most people in offices, not least those in high offices, spoke this language. They found that some people managed not to speak in bureaucratic riddles but that these were the exception not the rule. The tradition of plain-speaking, directness and forthrightness progressively disappeared as the world became bureaucratized.²²

Bureaucratic language tells us a lot about bureaucratic modernity. It suggests that bureaucratization is more than a function of rationalization, even if in part it is also that. It is clear that rationalization does generate bureaucratization. As procedural rationality spread through the course of the twentieth century, the response of organizational actors to problems changed. Rather than fix a problem directly, they opted for the indirect approach. They began to prefer to create a new procedure when-ever a new problem occurred. Procedural rationality pointed human beings away from the personal to the impersonal. No longer did anyone stuff up. Instead any fault and any correction of a fault was the result of rules, methods, and procedures. This had a crushing effect on individual responsibility and on the substantive outcomes of organized human action. Organizations henceforth thought of improvement as procedural change. Every act of problem-solving generated new procedures. The shift from 'ownership' to 'management' was a symptom of the dominance of procedural rationality. Its rise generated additional offices and multiplied functions. The creation, transmission and implementation of procedures required endless additional staff, resources and time. The resulting bureaus swamped organizations and the larger society with a tsunami of rules, handbooks, processes, plans, steps, guidelines, and policies. These were universally written in an awkward language that was pseudo-juridical and empty.

22 Against this, Castoriadis often referred to the classical Greek tradition of direct speaking, aka *parrhesia*. See for example 'The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy', *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (1991), pp. 107, 113.

Resources were re-allocated to rule generation and compliance. As the mid-20th century fascination with 'planning' was to show, outcomes were sacrificed to processes. Castoriadis was right to dub procedural rationality as a kind of pseudo-rational mastery. It constantly assures organizations that they are doing something when they are not. Procedures encourage the simulation of action. If one has a plan, then one can claim to have done something. Procedural rationality elicits ersatz, pretend, fake and mock action. As bureaucracy spreads, more and more people devote their working lives to producing, auditing, and reporting on fake action. Massive documents and weighty folders are testament to the endless plans of action that are never realized. These are matched by the suffocating reality of multitudinous procedures that break down everything—from science and industry to entertainment and learning—into fictitious analytic chunks designed to be governed by rules. Every step in these procedures is accompanied by forms, assessments, approvals, and reviews. Each of these demands resources, staff, and time.

Industrial modernity and its passion for productive innovation unleashed a huge quantum of uncertainty. Contingency was its child. Procedure, method and analysis promised that contingency could be mastered. But it couldn't be. Such mastery is illusionary. No amount of procedural specification can eliminate the unknown and the uncertain. So in every department of modern life unexpected problems appear. Bad contingencies arise. Accidents happen. Follies abound, unabated by rules. However, it is not only the illusion of procedural rationality that inspires bureaucracy. Procedural reason supposes that problems can be solved or forestalled by methodical rules. This though assumes that problems in themselves are unproblematic. That is not the case. For the greatest source of bureaucratization in the last century has been the vast effort to rationalize non-problems. Procedural reason supposes that dangerous behaviors can be obviated prospectively or retrospectively by good procedures. That supposes in turn that it is a straightforward matter to identify problem behaviors. It is not. In fact, the trend of the last century has been to identify an endless array of non-problems as problems, and then to devise methods, rules, processes, offices, functions, and agencies to deal with them. This happens in a way that seems remarkably easy. A few very vocal people sound off about a non-problem. That attracts an audience. The audience evolves into a lobby. The lobby gets a trial measure to deal with the non-problem. The measure devolves into regulations, rules, taxes, norms, policies, and plans. Offices, departments, bureaus, branches, units, and working groups are set up to promulgate and administer these. Reviews, reports, audits, inspections, checks, and assessments follow.

The greatest time and attention in a bureaucratic committee is always given over to the least important topic of discussion. Such committees will spend much more time discussing the name of a new building than they will in devising measures to deal with a devastating budget deficit engulfing their institution. Likewise in the choice of problems, a bureaucratic society devotes most of its attention not to serious problems but to specious non-problems. It gravitates to non-problems like global climate cooling or warming or the industrial emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere or the use of fossil fuels in automobiles. War and depression seem inconsequential in comparison. Of course the drive of bureaucratic societies is to make non-problems seem super-consequential. That is their curious nature. In these societies non-problems come to possess fake significance. They emit bogus urgency. They generate mock meaning. They give rise to faux crises and ersatz outpourings of human emotion. While they may be all sound and fury signifying nothing, nonetheless accompanying them always is a flood of fatuous language that implores human beings to take the non-problem seriously. Evidence is marshaled, polemics deployed, and arguments unleashed. The more bogus a problem, the greater is the weight of sententious opinion. That is why bureaucratic societies, though they are very procedural and are filled with empty methodical language games, are also aggressively moralizing. Moralizers aim barrages of 'oughts, shoulds and musts' at those who refuse to believe in the spurious weightiness of non-problems and who refuse to spend their time dignifying ridiculous topics with gravitas. The function of the moralizer is to 'prove' that what is silly is important. Thus we get from institutions in bureaucratic societies an onslaught of self-important language. It is engorged with a sense of its own significance yet conveys at the same time a distinct sense of its own absurdity and emptiness. It is barren, it is bare, and it is blank while it thinks of itself in the very opposite terms.

Castoriadis' gift was to give a name to the larger syndrome that generates an endless stream of prattle, claptrap and blather from social institutions. He pointed to a kind of capitalism that did not just produce hierarchy, alienation or instrumentalisation but that produced meaninglessness. Its agents said things, and did things, and undertook things that were hollow. Its endeavors, if looked at closely, were pointless. Castoriadis often fell back on older explanations of what was going on. He would talk about the body of managers who instrumentalized or appropriated the work of others in the production process.²³ But Kant and Marx did not really illuminate this new phase of capitalism. For what

23 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 273.

distinguished bureaucratic capitalism was that it systematically destroyed the significance of social activities; and following that it destroyed people's responsibility and initiative.²⁴ This was not the function of alienation or instrumentalisation. Rather it was a function of the destruction of meaning. Bureaucratic capitalism and the bureaucratization of the world generated insignificance. As it sucked the significance from activities in all domains of life, it caused human beings to disengage from life and substitute for that feckless irresponsibility.

As a consequence of bureaucratization, all kinds of human activities—from work to politics—stop being signifying activities. They stop being productive of meaning. Castoriadis explained this in quasi-Hegelian-cum-Romantic terms.²⁵ Accordingly meaning is a whole. Social systems that destroy meaning fragment things. They separate activities and things into parts without recomposing them. Castoriadis, again not quite being able to follow the implications of his own insight, thought of this carve up at work as being a variation of Adam Smith's division of labor. Labor is fragmented on the shop floor and only those who work in the office can give it meaning. But the bureaus that metastasized everywhere in twentieth-century society could not synthesize what had been set asunder.²⁶ Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* echoes in Castoriadis's work at this point. And beneath that, the over-tones of the Romantics are to be heard. But if we forget about Smith, Hegel and Marx, the basic point still stands. Bureaucratic society cannot synthesize and cannot thus generate meaning. Castoriadis doubted therefore that it could ensure its own cohesion.²⁷ The question, though, is why not? At several points Castoriadis offers a traditionalist account of its failure. At several crucial junctures through his career he did the same. He says that two centuries of capitalism had resulted in the collapse of the traditional system of values (religion and the family). Castoriadis actively disliked religion but regularly defended the family. He also appealed to community and solidarity, classic Romantic tropes, against fragmentation.²⁸ And he thought that the attempt to substitute 'rational' modern values in their place was pathetic. All that one got from that were streams of platitudes from political racketeers, which is certainly true.

In short, tradition fails in modernity but modern values are laughable. Writing in 1960, Castoriadis excoriates the vacuous chatter about 'the new "lay and republican" morality in France' spun by the Radical Socialist party. Nothing

24 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 273.

25 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', pp. 273–275.

26 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 275.

27 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 275.

28 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', pp. 274, 276.

changes—think today of the spine-tingling de-industrializing piffle proffered by the Greens parties or the juvenile inanity of the British Liberal Party to get a sense of the ridiculous nature of this vacuous values talk. Castoriadis shrewdly noted the effect of all of this on political participation. Subjected to wall-to-wall poppycock, people disengage from politics. Political parties were once mass organizations with huge memberships. Castoriadis observes, already in the late 1950s, how people were exiting from these parties in droves, and from the trade unions, even though by comparison with today these organizations were still huge relative to the population.²⁹ The former party and union members decamped into private life. Why? Because they saw that participation was meaningless. It obliged participants to agree with patently untrue or absurd statements. An alternate explanation of the cause of this disengagement was that it was an effect of hierarchy. In his 1911 book on *Political Parties*, the German sociologist Robert Michels observed what he called the iron law of oligarchy of the party. The party bosses ruled. Yet in 1911, by comparison with our own time, those parties still had massive memberships. Perhaps it is true that over the next century the oligarchs alienated the demos. But then that begs the question: how and why did that happen? True, party bosses over-ride popular sentiment in political parties of all persuasions. But then that is politics and the bosses in their own turn are routinely over-ridden by legislators and presidents and prime ministers. Oligarchs and hierarchs have been around a very long time and frequently have had mass followings. So why were the oligarchs unable to retain large memberships in parties and trade unions in the twentieth century? Perhaps this has to do with the fact that bureaucratization is not simply a synonym for hierarchy and it does not simply work through alienation or instrumentalisation. Its effects are much more direct and its causes are much more specific.

Bureaucratization is the production of meaninglessness. A trade union exists to defend the most vulnerable and the least advantaged of its members. It substitutes the power of association and combination for the power of skill or capital. Yet as time passed by, trade unions came increasingly to defend not the most vulnerable and least advantaged but rather the most dysfunctional and least able. Those who most suffered were other union members who had to undertake the work of the lazy and the inept. The hard working and the competent found that the labor market better recognized their skills and wasted their time less than their union representatives who told fairy tales about capacity, competence, reward and opportunity. A credibility gap opened up between rhetoric and reality. The nature of bureaucratic fairy tales is that,

29 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 280.

as stories, they are unassailable. One is not permitted to question them. Union members found that puncturing holes in ridiculous official tales (like the tales of class struggle) only caused them to be ticked off. So rather than be chastised for not believing the nonsense they were served up, they simply gave up their membership in the leagues of twaddle. Those who remained were either those who believed the credulous fairy tales or those who most benefited from them. Bureaucratization is successful not because so many people spontaneously believe the quack mythology that it sprouts (though some do) but rather because it generates material interests (offices, apparatuses and incomes) that make the beneficiaries of those interests choose to believe the unbelievable.

An example might help explain this. In 1935 the *New York Times* introduced to the world the term 'boondoggle'. The *Times* reported that the Franklin Roosevelt's administration had spent \$3 million on recreation activities for the unemployed including the making of craft oddments like 'boon doggles'. The term stuck. It describes waste-of-money projects. Bureaucratic societies, and the bureaucratic form of capitalism, are an endless producer of boondoggles. Roosevelt's New Deal, which managed to prolong the Great Depression in the United States for many more years than in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, did so by inventing boondoggle capitalism, otherwise known as state capitalism or bureaucratic capitalism. From 1931 to the present, this delinquent form of capitalism has flourished. It has done so by attaching itself to the empty but persuasive signifiers of a bureaucratic society. These are signifiers that are filled with ersatz meaning. 'Folk art' and 'craft activity' are examples. These are typical of the kind of inverse signifiers that are popular in a bureaucratic society. Industrialism inspires anti-industrial signifiers; sophisticated urbanism embraces folk and indigenous symbols. None of these symbols mean anything. They are dislocated from any society in which they might have a meaning. They have no functional or substantive role in a modern society. Indeed most of them are complete fictions. They are tokens of a romantic authenticity that is manufactured in high modern urban locations.

Spending programs readily attach themselves to symbols of this type. Partly this is so because there is a big audience for them. Because they are empty, they are free floating and they are easily adapted to all kinds of rhetorical purposes. They come in very handy when policy architects seek to justify public spending. Max Weber declared that substantive rationality had been replaced by procedural rationality. Ends were replaced with rules. But this is not quite true. In a lot of cases in fact the rationality of ends was replaced by the rationality of spurious ends. Romantic symbols (folk, green, people, community, earth symbols) provide servings of pseudo-meaning in an industrial, urban, machine world. But they are not the only source of fake meaning. Anti-romantic symbols can

be just as usefully deployed to that end. A classic one is 'national security'. In 2010 the US Army in Afghanistan spent \$119 million annually to lease 3,000 cars at around \$40,000 a year per car. The General Services Administration concluded that the military could have leased and maintained the same number of vehicles for about \$60 million a year, half the cost.³⁰ It is not that economic welfare or military contracting are unreal in themselves (quite the contrary). Nevertheless, accreted layers of fakeness manage to attach to their body. False, faux, make-believe and sham meaning readily projects itself onto substantive meaning in bureaucratic modernity. Almost every modern 'ism' is filled to brim with insignificance. It is as though the twentieth century willed itself to satisfy its meaning needs with counterfeit meaning of all kinds. The most fake of all of the ideologies were the authenticity ideologies. Almost anything that is promoted as genuine (genuinely national, natural, popular) is a sham. When Presidents start talking about 'the folks', beware. The high-tech money-lenders and bundlers are standing adjacent, off-stage. If patriotism was the last refuge of the scoundrel in Samuel Johnson's time, then in our own time authenticity is the last refuge of ultra-modern ultra-liberal elites as they squeeze persuasive insignificance from the rock of meaning. One knows that this is something that cannot continue indefinitely.

The capitalism that these elites have created—bureaucratic capitalism—is a capitalism of feint, affectation, simulation, and put on. It flourishes in a world of fauxitalism in which the state grants enterprises large amounts of money to satisfy popular excitement about one or other empty signifier that the larger society (for a time) fawns over. The case of the Obama-era scandal of Solyndra the Californian solar cell manufacturer that in 2009 took a \$535 million loan guarantee from the US federal government and then filed for Chapter Eleven bankruptcy in 2011 is typical and hardly exceptional. In the 1980s, the US Federal Government provided \$147 million of taxpayers' money to the 'Solar One' solar energy plant in California, \$1.5 billion in loan guarantees to the Great Plains Synfuels, and \$78 million for the New Iberia ethanol plant constructed by Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi's company Triad America.³¹ All of these schemes went bust. Biofuels, clean energy, and green energy are classic empty signifiers. Each of them promise the impossible: to match the economy and volume of fossil fuels.

In the last eighty years, we have seen the rise and rise and rise of junk: junk culture, junk science, junk business, and junk everything. Much of this

30 Weinstein, A. (2011). 'The All-Time 10 Worst Military Contracting Boondoggles'. *Mother Jones*, September 2.

31 Fisher, D. (2008). 'A Brief History of Energy Boondoggles'. *Forbes Magazine*, November 24.

has come with the imprimatur of the state. Many of the junk schemes have their source and more especially their funding in the state. The grant and the subsidy have become powerful mediums for producing junk. The art of those who apply for the grant and those who give the grant is to generate plausible meaninglessness. This is meaninglessness that appears to have a meaning. 'We will produce energy sufficient to power a modern society from wind or solar sources.' That is a statement that at first glance seems to have a meaning. It connects with the human impulse not to foul the natural environment. Yet all 'clean' energy sources are uneconomic. They cost much more than energy from fossil fuels. These are industries that can only exist if they are subsidized. This is a perfect example of bureaucratic capitalism. It only exists through transfer payments from taxpayers. It is a corporate welfare economy. A bureaucratic society produces endless examples of boondoggles. It does this because its inner essence is to produce nothing. The easiest way of producing nothing, though by no means the only way, is for government to subsidize the production of nothing. Now a grant-getter cannot literally say to government that the intention is to produce nothing. Rather what is invariably stated is that what will be produced is of deep, unfathomable and profound importance to society. Its good is incalculable. Its potential benefit is stupendous. If the project is not subsidized then terrible harm will follow. If the unemployed workers do not get their boondoggle folk-art training then they will suffer from alcoholism, suicide, family break up, and marital stress. Their children will despise them and their parents will spurn them. The bunkum works for a while, and sometimes for a long time. But eventually it stops working and the schemes, subsidies and grants are finally closed down, and forever after nobody talks about the great promise that somehow has mysteriously evaporated.

The number and scale of boondoggles today suggests that bureaucratic capitalism is more popular now than when Castoriadis was writing in 1960. The alienation model which Castoriadis had recourse to at the time suggested that people do not like meaninglessness, so they retreat into private life and consume.³² They compensate for lack of meaning with social irresponsibility.³³ They indulge in irrationality. They produce waste. Work becomes a source of income or security or opportunity for promotion but not a source of intrinsic meaning. In Weber's terms, the work ethic declines. The stupid ethic rises. With irresponsibility comes indifference. With indifference comes a lack of initiative. Nothing matters, and what if it did? There is some truth in all of this. Yet boondoggle capitalism has had a very long life because one of the paradoxes

32 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', pp. 278, 280.

33 Castoriadis, C. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', p. 280.

of the epoch of the bureaucratic society is that people—to a point—love the meaninglessness that it generates. Specious meaning can be at times quite popular—even if it is routinely followed by buyers' regret. Bureaucracy has spread everywhere into almost every crack and crevice of social life. People despise it, but they also love it—to a point.

How can one love the state of meaninglessness? How can it be that a society that requires, like all societies, a core of meaning is able to live off the endless production of nonsense? Well it can—but it cannot do so forever. For the simulation of meaning has a short shelf life. Simulation of meaning is to life as kitsch is to art. Kitsch has the superficial appearance of art, but it is not art. Bureaucratic language appears to convey meaning, but in reality it does not. If the human imagination rests on the power of analogy, then simulation is the production of false analogies. Bureaucracy produces the likeness or simulation of services, products, and knowledge. Yet when looked at closely, the likeness fades to nothing. Bureaucracy says that it is doing something but in fact it does nothing of substance. The imagination looks at a tree and sees a house. Bureaucracy says it is providing housing and produces a likeness of that in the guise of a paper trail of approvals, compliance procedures, and risk assessments whose medium is a non-language. This non-language does not represent the production of a house, one of the anchors of a meaningful human existence. Rather it represents the production of non-sense in the guise of a method without substance and process indifferent to outcome. The house is the almost accidental by-product of check, appraisal, approval, sanction, and rule. People disapprove of this. They are irritated by the delays, the form-filling, the reviews and the compliance steps. But they also approve of it, for they love the fake meaning that these processes invoke. They loved the 'planned society' in the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s and the 'green society' of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. That none of these pseudo-societies came to anything but bureaucracy is the point. Socialism and environmentalism are systems of fake meaning. That Castoriadis rather liked environmentalism is beside the point.³⁴ He was right to grasp that modern bureaucracy is the production of meaninglessness. That it manages to create fake meaning by apparent authentic meanings is the cunning of its reason, no more. We all get sucked in one way or another. The enduring question left from this is whether societies can perpetually live off fake meaning if society relies on the production of substantial meaning. It is doubtful. If so, then what is the future of substantive meaning in a world mesmerized by *fauxitalism*?

34 Castoriadis, C. (1976). 'Reflections on "Rationality" and "Development."' In (1991). *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. pp. 199–218.

Contexts of Capitalism: From the ‘Unlimited Extension of “Rational Mastery”’ to Civilizational Varieties of Accumulation and Economic Imagination

Jeremy Smith

Introduction

When Castoriadis disavowed historical materialism, he began a long process of re-theorising capitalism as the imaginary signification of the endless expansion of ‘rational mastery.’¹ His critique goes to the heart of the conceptual apparatus of political economy. In his most methodical publication, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987),² he ended his engagement with Marxism and what he came to believe was its metaphysics of value. Capitalism’s historical novelty lay not in the exponential accumulation of surplus value but in the phantasms of pseudo-rational mastery; that is in the capitalist imaginary of endless expansion and conquest of humanity and of the natural sub-stratum.

In this chapter, Castoriadis’ notion of the capitalist imaginary is assessed against Johann P Arnason’s analysis of capitalism. Arnason’s reconstruction of Weber’s metaphor of the ‘spirit’ of capitalism and his less-developed metaphor of ‘mirage’ are the points on which he generates a more nuanced image of capitalism.³ I conclude from Arnason’s work that Castoriadis’ theorisation

1 Castoriadis, C. (1987). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Castoriadis, C. (1991). “Reflections on Nationality and Development.” In Curtis, D.A. (Ed.). *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. New York: Oxford University Press. Castoriadis, C. (2007a). The “Rationality” of Capitalism. In *Figures of the Thinkable*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Castoriadis, C. (2010). *A Society Adrift. Interviews and Debates 1974–1997*. New York: Fordham University Press.

2 Castoriadis, C. (1987).

3 Arnason, J.P. (2001). *Capitalism in Context: Sources, Trajectories and Alternatives. Thesis Eleven*. Arnason, J.P. (2003). *Civilisations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions*. Leiden: Brill. Arnason, J.P. (2007). *Civilizational Analysis: A Paradigm in the Making*, In Holton, R. (Ed.). *Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS)*, Developed under the auspices of the UNESCO. Oxford: EOLSS Publishers.

of capitalism requires consideration of regional contexts and reformative programs enacted by states. Those contexts and programs refashion the imaginary signification of endless expansion of rationality. In this chapter the exploration of potential connections between Castoriadis' work and Arnason's reconstruction of the unfinished paradigm of civilisational theory centres on Japan as the case informing our argument. Arnason's work on Japan draws attention to some important limits to the image of infinite capitalist expansion posited by Castoriadis, as well as confirming forces of expansion at work in the Japanese constellation.⁴

At first sight, Japan appears a good fit for Castoriadis' theory of imaginary signification of rational mastery. With deeper scrutiny Japan's historical experience looks more complex. In short, further insights from Japan specialists serve to underscore exceptional (if not entirely unique) state-guided programs of promotion of capitalist development. Successive organisational, ideological and institutional reforms of macroeconomic policy and planning, urban planning and environmental regulation domesticated the imaginary significations of capitalism in ways that promoted capitalist disciplines in some respects, while constraining the objective of inexhaustible growth in other ways. Japan's social movements are especially important in defining and, in turn, acting to modify capitalism through their agency.

This chapter starts with a summary of Castoriadis' perspective, moves to Arnason, and then highlights the regime of growth in Japan and contemporary traditions that limit expansion.

Castoriadis and the Imaginary Significations of Capitalism

For Castoriadis, the social imaginary generates core social imaginary significations of the unlimited extension of rational mastery which seem after the fact to be 'the spirit of the system.'⁵ Castoriadis' conception of imaginary significations of infinite rational mastery at this point in his work substitute for attempts at finely-grained multi-causal theorisation. This includes the conceptual apparatus of modern capitalism as:

4 Arnason, J.P. (1997). *Social Theory and Japanese Experience: The Dual Civilisation*. London: Kegan Paul International.. Arnason, J.P. (2002). *The Peripheral Centre: Essays on Japanese History and Civilisation*. Melbourne: Transpacific Press.

5 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 46.

... a new “idea”, the idea that the unlimited growth of production and of the productive forces is *in fact* the central objective of human existence. This “idea” is what I call a *social imaginary signification*. To it correspond new attitudes, values, and norms, a new social definition of reality and of being, of what *counts* and what does *not* count.⁶

The hubristic and elusive goal of mastery is aided by the expansion of calculability in all spheres of social life.⁷ Rationality of this kind confers on capitalist operations the imagination of knowable regularities. The internal and self-evident consistencies of rationality represent a way of thinking, perceiving and believing in which the capitalist organisation of social life is pictured as inescapably rational. In the nineteenth century, political economy fostered this deep impression by establishing as an axiom the presupposition that a universal value underpinned all exchange. Subsequently, an objective of political economy was to disclose from the economic system of exchangeable values (which gives off the impression of a law-like constitution) the nature of utility, quantities, and regularities (or what appear as regularities). For Castoriadis, the chief imaginary significations of capitalism established as a *datum* that the economy is intrinsically and self-evidently rational and therefore subject to such disclosure.⁸ The whole purpose of the work of political economy has been to compute the best and most efficient ways to maximise output while minimising costs. This in turn rests on the disclosure of economic laws that appear to be extra-social, but still knowable and therefore given to such computation.

The so-called laws discerned by the science of political economy reflect the imaginary significations that institute the self-sufficiency of the economic sphere: ‘... the ‘economy’ and the ‘economic’ are central social imaginary significations which do not ‘refer’ to something but on the basis of which a host of things are socially represented, reflected, acted upon and made as economic’⁹ and ‘as the focal and supreme value of social life.’¹⁰ Capitalism’s tendency is the steady subsumption of the social world by the economy. This tendency can never be fully realized. However, it privileges an everlasting quest for ever-more and ever-new goods, services, investment, growth, jobs and material

6 Castoriadis, C. (1991). p. 184.

7 Castoriadis, C. (2007a).

8 Castoriadis, C. (1991). pp. 187–91.

9 Castoriadis, C. (1987). p. 362.

10 Castoriadis, C. (2007a). p. 50.

prosperity;¹¹ in short, everything implicit in capitalism's promise.¹² Capitalism's premise of ceaseless growth presents the major threat of this age to the very environment in which capitalism is instituted and recreated.¹³

Civilization and the 'Spirits' of Capitalism

The view taken in this chapter is that an important corrective to his conception of the imaginary significations of capitalism can be developed out of consideration of Arnason's work. The specific corrective I refer to has to do with how core premises of social life acquire substance in particular regional environments. In Arnason's view, capitalism transforms pre-existing primary elements.¹⁴ His interpretation of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005), Christoph Deutschmann (1998), Fernand Braudel (1997) and, of course, Castoriadis reconstructs Weber's metaphor of the 'spirit' of capitalism in a way that it can be sensitively applied to regional contexts of non-Western modernities. The result is a historicised understanding of capitalism's constitution as 'varieties of accumulation.'¹⁵

At a primary level, there are primary elements of capitalism which support the basic work of accumulation, expansion and institutional consolidation.¹⁶ An example of this is money. Among the primary elements, money is vital as the imaginary embodiment of expansion associated with production and consumption.¹⁷ Money passes through the world in the historical development of global capitalism, not as an imperfect bearer of labour value (or not mainly as that), but as a general symbol of utility. Its potential for mobility and universal significance gives it an elemental quality. As the sign of capitalism, money is so fundamental that it rises over cultures, spaces, regions and zones of the world economy and so becomes trans-spatial as well as trans-cultural.

11 Castoriadis, C. (1987). pp. 206–8.

12 Straume, I. (2011). "The Political Imagery of Global Capitalism." In Straume and Humphrey, J.F. (Eds.). *Depoliticization: The Political Imagery of Global Capitalism*. Aarhus: NSU Press.

13 Castoriadis, C. (1981). From ecology to Autonomy. Thesis Eleven 3, (1): 8–22. See also Adams, S. (2012). Castoriadis at the Limits of Autonomy? Ecological Worldhood and the Hermeneutic of Modernity. *European Journal of Social Theory* 15, 3: 313–329.

14 Arnason, J.P. (2001). pp. 13–4.

15 Arnason, J.P. (2005). The Varieties of Accumulation: Civilizational Perspectives on Capitalism. In Joerges, C., Strath, B. and Wagner, P. (Eds.). *The Economy as Polity: The Political Constitution of Contemporary Capitalism*. London: UCL Press.

16 Arnason, J.P. (2003). pp. 261–87.

17 Arnason, J.P. (2003). pp. 277–80.

But it is how this elemental core of capitalism (*viz.* the symbolisation of utility and mobility) is given a concrete form that reflects a wider problem of how social imaginary significations manifest in particular societies. Arnason elaborates this problem in his description of the variable relationships of civilisational heritage and capitalist imaginary, relationships never considered by Castoriadis. To begin with, accumulation takes divergent forms¹⁸ and should not be mistaken for capacity to industrialise and an orientation to doing so.¹⁹ However, accumulation and trajectories of industrialism are context dependent. The generation of wealth and industry are inseparable from regimes of power and forms of meaning. Social imaginary significations are interpreted in cultural contexts and in a variety of ways.²⁰ The social imaginary significations are ‘concretized’ in particular societies, even civilisations. Following Deutschmann’s work on the unacknowledged religious qualities of capitalism, Arnason argues:

... there is no standard unchanging version of this religious message, Rather it is periodically translated and retranslated into myths or phantasms which seem to concretize the capitalist promise in terms appropriate to changing historical situations, and may be more or less open to unorthodox interpretations. Taylorism and Fordism are classic cases in point, the contemporary cult of flexibility, deregulation and totally mobile capital belongs in the same category.²¹

I argue that this can be characterised also as the *domestication* of social imaginary significations. ‘Domestication’ better encapsulates the process by which elemental meanings are grounded but still retain their power to circulate in other societies, or indeed their universalising character. The elemental character of the social imaginary significations of capitalism—in this instance the tendency to expansion—remains, but is domesticated in the institutional formations of the state and the organisational constellation of business and labour.

To return to Arnason’s revision of Weber’s spirit of capitalism—and to relocate my own argument in Arnason’s terms—I draw the following provisional conclusion. Social imaginary significations are highly adaptable to different environments and open to a succession of ‘spirits’. Recasting Castoriadis’s

18 Arnason, J.P. (2005).

19 Arnason, J.P. (2002). pp. 166–167.

20 Arnason, J.P. (2002) pp. 138–148.

21 Arnason, J.P. (2002). p. 184.

understanding in this manner brings back in the contingency of the varieties of accumulation.

Arnason's revision of Weber's notion of the spirit of capitalism reiterates Braudel's warning that capitalism should not be considered an invariable economic system unrelated to the social orders and cultures it is embedded in.²² While capitalism may at times dominate other dimensions of the social formation, it never completely captures them. Thus, the 'ascendancy of capitalism is accompanied by ongoing adjustment to the contexts in which it is embedded, and the varying patterns of interaction between the two trends give rise to more or less durable and distinctive varieties of capitalism.'²³ Capitalism could not continue if it achieved a state of total domination or total homogenisation. The primary elements of capitalism are, on one hand, checked and, on the other, pliant and able to adjust to different environments.

However, more is needed. Inputs of meaning in the form of 'orientation, justification and motivation'²⁴ make accumulation possible by making it meaningful. Arnason touches on the work of Boltanski and Chiapello²⁵ to bring to the surface two neglected cultural aspects of capitalism: new regimes of motivation and the absorption of anti-capitalist critique. Both are features of the highly adaptable 'spirit' of capitalism which add particular cultural orientations and ideological supports to the indispensable elemental core of rationality. Capitalism's institutions are able to absorb aspects of critical reform programs and counter-cultures and adjust organisational principles accordingly: 'the spirit of capitalism is present and active throughout successive phases, it undergoes historical mutations, and it is capable of borrowing ideas and images from the critique of capitalism.'²⁶

To draw this point to focused conclusion, I return to a key passage in an essay on the institution of modernity.²⁷ He finds that the contrast made by Castoriadis between modernity's two constitutive poles of capitalism and autonomy ought to be further relativised. To begin with, a nuanced interpretation of Castoriadis' contrast of these two interpenetrating poles of modernity would see their fusion as a regular feature of social formations. In other

22 Arnason, J.P. (2001). pp. 120–4.

23 Arnason, J. P. (2001). p. 123.

24 Arnason, J. P. (2001). p. 107.

25 Boltanski, L. and Chiapello, E. (2005). Elliot, G. (Trans). *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso.

26 Arnason, J.P. (2005). p. 29.

27 Arnason, J.P. (1989a). *The Imaginary Institution of Modernity*. *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales*, 27, 86: 323–337.

words, instances of autonomy (including critical and radical interpretations) can indeed be construed to serve the spirit of capitalism as well as reaching beyond it. Arnason makes a point reminiscent of Boltanski and Chiapello that the spirit of capitalism in its institutionalised forms is routinely too close to all critiques of capitalism to maintain the sharp stand-off between capitalism and autonomy cast by Castoriadis. He then reminds us that these need to be understood in context, specifically civilisational contexts. An assessment of the Japanese civilisational and political domestication of the social imaginary signification of mastery ought to extend and recompose this supposition.

Japan's Capitalism and Its Spirits

Castoriadis has no major commentary on Japan. In contrast, Arnason's wide-ranging exploration study of Japan has greatly influenced his own theoretical reflections on capitalism.²⁸ Arnason's discussion of Japanese capitalism emphasizes the greater variations of 'spirit'. Like the West, Japan had a phase of modern philosophical argumentation that furnished core beliefs of virtue, interests, value and utility. However, the sequential unfolding of the spirit of capitalism followed a different path. The vibrancy of early modern market cities gave way to a larger-scale developmentalist state from the 1890s onwards. The Meiji regime of that era engaged in an intense project of nation-building that cultivated a nationalist imaginary of exceptional force. This was a second spirit, one associated with the wartime empire and a regional political economy. Its orientation to technological innovation and growth were easy to retain after the Pacific War and the passing of militarism. That reorientation was then re-harnessed in a framework of nationalist economic goal-setting. This strategy is cast as a 'successor spirit' because of its continuities with the empire.

For Arnason the novelty of the post-war reinvention of capitalism is exaggerated greatly.²⁹ Perspectives on the developmental state led by Chalmers Johnson strike Arnason as the most adequate in balancing continuities with the real miracle of national consolidation during the Tokugawa era and industrialisation during the Meiji era, on one hand, and genuinely original developments after the Pacific War, on the other. Two of the latter stand out: deepening aspects of the strategic sector of the economy (in which labour is disciplined and the state and business cooperate) and the enhanced participation brought about by extension of earlier experiences of democracy.

²⁸ Arnason, J.P. (1997) and (2002).

²⁹ Arnason, J.P. (1997). pp. 475–502. (2002). pp. 191–202.

The internationalisation of the Japanese mode of globality was an important process in the international arena, if a wildly exaggerated one in its actual impact. Regional extension helped to prolong capitalist developmentalism which, Arnason argues, is better construed as a 'regime' rather than a state.

In this context, Arnason's metaphor of the 'mirage' warrants brief discussion. As Arnason employs it, the notion of mirage refers to the set of functioning myths without which capitalism is unworkable and in fact unthinkable: 'imaginary projections of broader meanings and frameworks.'³⁰ The distinction from Japan's composite spirit of capitalism is never stated, nor is it clear why Arnason introduced this second metaphor. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, Arnason does not use it except in the context of Japan and, indeed, in one major essay only.³¹

Below I elaborate how the interpretive metaphor of mirage could be applied to Japan's post-war growth from the point where Arnason's discussion of Japanese capitalism begins to thin out. The emphasis in my analysis is on the multiple domains in which the capitalist imaginary is instituted and domesticated in Japan. The following domains illustrate well the grounding or domestication of the imaginary significations of capitalism: the program of 'growth-ism', increased environmental regulation of industry since the 1970s, the further enchantment of technoscience, the tension-laden expansion of consumption and the counteractive agency of contestatory social movements.

'Growth-ism'

A conservative consensus underpinned the post-war period during which the landscape was progressively urbanised.³² Scott O'Brien's history of the idea of growth illustrates how historically-specific Japanese interpretations of the signification of infinite rational mastery are.³³ The re-emergence of industrial capitalism was distinguished by the eminence of growth as a national objective. Without doubt, the coalescence of 'growth-ism' capitalised on the pre-war experience of industrial expansion, development of new instruments of planning and mobilisation of labour, as well as the inculcation of the habits of a

30 Arnason, J.P. (2002). p. 174.

31 Arnason, J.P. (2002). pp. 158–202.

32 Sorenson, A. (2002). *The Making of Urban Japan: Cities and Planning from Edo to the Twenty First Century*. pp. 168–199. London: Routledge.

33 Scott. (2009).

monetarised social life (including the routines of saving).³⁴ However, these were put to use for microeconomic purposes. By way of contrast, new capitalist disciplines were harnessed in the 1950s and 1960s to bring *growth* into national focus introducing ‘... new elements to national economic and political imaginaries.’³⁵ If growth was fuelled by an influx of energy from outside sources, it was also directed by assertive and deliberative policy-making.³⁶

Four elements of the coalescence of the objective of growth can be distinguished on the basis of O’Brien’s analysis. Firstly, the development of an apparatus of statistical techniques and diagnostic tools added to positivist social science. Statisticians drew up vast and comprehensive datasets, developed a national accounting system and published compendia of statistics. Techniques of statistical quantification came to pervade the work and purpose of the central ministries, whilst also seeping into the public consciousness during the course of recovery.³⁷ In turn, the leap in statistical science buttressed the second element—the emergence of macroeconomics as an ‘analytical paradigm.’³⁸ Partly competing perspectives of Marxist and Keynesian political economy had laid the groundwork for macroeconomics. Economic problems were redefined as technical matters subject to technocratic adjustment, not political issues determined by the citizenry. The turn to macroeconomics provided legitimacy to the key ministries (trade, finance, construction) to administer through bureaucratic guidance.

Thirdly, the ‘GNP’ moved from obscurity as a notion of academic economics to become the key conceptual instrument at work across the national polity. Prime Minister Hiroshi Ikeda’s totemic declaration of the goal of GNP-doubling heralded the arrival of growth as the new goal of national mobilization. The *Income Doubling Plan 1960* and related documents of that period signalled a decisive realignment of governmental strategies to a comprehensive program of growth.³⁹ Under the guise of trade liberalisation, the *Plan* sets out the virtues of full employment, state guidance, the balance of competition and cooperation between business alliances, and maintenance of popular welfare.

Growth was not just an end under this plan; it was also the means. Growth itself would fuel growth. Popularising this idea was vital to its success (as both

34 O’Brien. (2009) pp. 50–64.

35 O’Brien. (2009) p. 15.

36 Hein, L. (1990). *Fuelling Growth: the Energy Revolution and Economic Policy in Postwar Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

37 O’Brien. (2009) pp. 64–87.

38 O’Brien. (2009) p. 4.

39 de Bary et al. (2005) pp. 1100–1105.

means and end). A key element was a vision of prosperity and full employment. Before the proliferation of light consumer industries, this vision must have truly seemed a mirage. However, growth was set out as a modernisation of all sectors (including the so-called backward ones) and full employment of all 'factors of production' (including workers). As an operative vision of a middle-classed Japan, this was remarkably effective. Quick results in the early 1960s led to popular enchantment with growth,⁴⁰ and a subsidence of the labour and anti-war conflicts of 1960.

'Growth-ism' established the settings for the post-war re-constitution of Japanese capitalism. Planning continued, particularly with Kakuei Tanaka's plan to 'Build a New Japan' through a national scheme of public works throughout the archipelago.⁴¹ Moreover, it included a shift away from dependence on oil. Yasuhiro Nakasone's administration in the 1980s proved a turning point as planning became less comprehensive in its scope. Growth remained the purpose, more so than ever in fact. The injurious side of the mania for growth was long evident, however.

Environmental Policy and Protest

Re-industrialisation generated some of the most critical cases of pollution in the world at that time. Protest in the 1960s compelled all levels of government to institute pollution controls.⁴² A weak Basic Law for Environmental Protection gave way to some of the strongest existing legislation in the world in 1970. Although successful in reducing the output of chemical effluent, the broad spectrum of environmental problems strained the legal framework and tested the embryonic and small Environmental Agency bureaucracy. Dioxin pollution, the loss of historical and coastline heritage, deforestation, the extinction of species and the damming and concretisation of mountain areas and waterways did not receive the degree of attention that petrochemical pollution did.

40 O'Brien. (2009) pp. 158–160.

41 Compare with Augustin Berque who suggests that Tanaka's plan was the last gasp of the ideology of high growth. (1997, pp. 168–170). However, Berque's analysis of the logic of Tanaka's plan suggests to me that the ideology of growth in fact had enduring force.

42 Broadbent. (1998). Hasegawa, K. (2004). *Constructing Civil Society in Japan: Voices of Environmental Movements*. pp. 42–52. Rosanna, Victoria: Trans Pacific Press. Also in McKean, M.A. (1981). *Environmental Protest and Citizen Politics in Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Where comparable states variously regulate these fields of the living environment, in Japan the 'downstream' effects of re-industrialisation have worsened.⁴³ Note that 'regulation' in Japan refers to a flexible legal framework in which bureaucratic guidance is exercised, rather than procedural management of corporate behaviour, consumer preferences and conservation of resources. The collusive mode of governance combining state and party bureaucracies with business elites, which had promoted the ideal of growth in the 1950s and 1960s, helped facilitate the development and implementation of environmental policy from the 1970s on.⁴⁴

It was 'upstream' effects—controlling industrial waste, improving energy efficiency, promoting international measures to curb global warming—that Japanese governments and public administration show a greater level of commitment to environmental goals. Global initiatives seem the most notable. This should be no surprise as sensitivity over international reputation is a significant influence on Japanese actions. Even so, this is uneven and does not extend to the issue of Japan's international fishing and whaling.⁴⁵ As noted, it was in 'downstream' activities that the most deleterious effects were evident. 'Everyday life pollution' has been the pressing concern since the 1980s. Much of this touched on consumption practices, as described below.

In summary, environmental policy emerged to temper the unrestrained impact of pollution on common land, waterways and air. Regulation sat in the framework of planning established by the 1970s. The proviso of the earlier Basic Law for Environmental Protection that regulation remain in 'harmony' with the objective of growth has continued in the practice of large scale public financing of infrastructural development often characterized as a tendency of the construction state—*dokken kokka*.⁴⁶ Environmental policy was dualistic in its impact. On one hand, it constrained the implicit objective of growth; on the other, it responded to the outbreak of protest by city-based, peri-urban and rural communities. Across the world, science enjoys an equivocal relationship with different kinds of environmentalism. In Japan, the favoured position of

43 Hasegawa, K. (2004).

44 Lam, P. (2011a). Japan's Environmental Politics and Change: Local, National and Global in Gaunder, A. (Ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Politics*. pp. 236–245. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis.

45 Lam, P. (2011b). Japan's Politics of Environment and Climate Change: From NIMBY to Global Networks. In Jain, P. and Williams, B. (Eds.). *Japan in Decline: Fact or Fiction?* pp. 74–91. Kent: Global Oriental.

46 (McCormack 1996).

science in the institutions of capitalism (particularly in its post-war reconstitution) meant that the connection was less ambiguous.

Technoscience

An investment of faith in technological innovation was indispensable in the post-war take-off. Capitalist development can be periodised into three phases: dependence on favourable licensing arrangements for patents held by Western firms; tighter controls by central government; and a public/private combination of research and development investment.⁴⁷ In this passage I focus on the latter.

The 1973 oil crisis was a watershed that reoriented the country to the national goal of a 'knowledge' economy. The momentous turn to 'technological nation-building' brought large-scale institutional coordination to innovation.⁴⁸ 'Network' might be an overused concept in current day sociology. However, its relevance to the position of science in late Japanese modernity is unmistakable.⁴⁹ A host of research organisations, universities, businesses and public authorities were attracted to large-scale projects of innovation. Technological development the quality of a 'mirage' enchanting new and potential informational industries such as electronics, computing, robotics, and biotechnologies. Moreover, hi-tech development stimulated debate around the core logics of science in Japan.⁵⁰ Full automation of key phases of manufacturing cycles was a goal that inspired serious automational innovation in robotics and new generation information technology. One phase of innovation involved the fifth generation project of the 1980s, an ambitious initiative to create a new mainframe architecture to enhance Japanese competitiveness. Breakthroughs in the development of personal computers left it behind. But the research that occurred contributed significantly to international science while the cooperation of business, scientific institutes and

47 Low, M. Nakamura, S. and Yoshioka, H. (1999). Technology versus Commercial Feasibility: Nuclear Power and Electric Utilities. In *Science, Technology and Society in Contemporary Japan*, pp. 66–81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

48 (Morris-Suzuki, 1994, pp. 210–219). Morris-Suzuki, T. (1994). *The Technological Transformation of Japan: From the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

49 Morris-Suzuki, T. (1994). pp. 182–202.

50 Morris-Suzuki, T. (1995). "Fuzzy Logic: Science, Technology and Postmodernity in Japan." In Arnason, J.P. and Sugimoto, Y. (Eds.). *Japanese Encounters and Modernity*. London: Kegan Paul International.

government consolidated a public/private model of investment in research.⁵¹ Institutional support of scientific research in itself did not produce inventions so much as coordination between the work of scientific institutes and corporate groupings that market new technologies for consumers. The result was an institutional environment that nurtured a highly-energized imaginative creativity. Science was not 'autonomous' (in the sense of detached from capitalist interests or governmental direction), but differentiated in operative logic from other social actors. The Japanese developmental figuration allowed a place for science to conduct 'pure' research and give impetus to an inventiveness that put Japan in a leading position in many scientific fields.

Leadership in technoscience during the years of the bubble economy nourished self-assured belief in expansion. An abiding confidence in ongoing improvement in technology and the acceleration of innovation was grounded in the constant activity of governmental bureaucrats in the Ministry of Technology and Industry (MITI), the Ministry of Construction and, to a much lesser degree, the Ministry of Finance. Governmental guidance and planning was sustained by bureaucratic factions that acted as the capillaries, so to speak, of information flow which vitally ensured that innovative ideas were shared.

Japan's cities came to be seen as experimental laboratories for the bureaucratic cadre of the national government held in the thrall of innovation. Hundreds of science cities and technology parks were planned for the entire archipelago. Furthermore, twenty-six cities were earmarked for conversion to technopolises. The plan was to build satellite settlements of around 50,000 people near a major prefectural city.⁵² Such high-tech communities would be new sources of national growth and investment in the country's peripheral areas. Buoyed by an inflated treasury from the bubble economy, the government's main infrastructural ministries fuelled their projection of extended technological reach with 'the hubris and grand visions of the bubble era.'⁵³ Efforts to engineer urban incubators of this kind had revived a latent Japanese utopianism and turned it to planned support for company research and development.⁵⁴ Thus, the strategy around creating high-tech sites boosted research and gave impetus to new coalitions of business, bureaucratic and political interests. The strategy was not a spectacular success. Even so, the demonstration effect of 'Japan as Model' in urban planning remained undeniable.

51 Low et al. (1999). pp. 35–49.

52 Sorenson, A. (2002) pp. 261–4, 284.

53 Sorenson, A. (2002) p. 286.

54 Low, M. and Marriot, H. (1996). *Japanese Science, Technology and Economic Growth Down Under*. Clayton: Monash Asia Institute. Also see Morris-Suzuki, T. (1994) pp. 225–229.

The ultra-utopian nature of Japan's city project planning in the 1980s and 1990s qualifies as a case of a mirage of development, the operationalisation of techno-engineering dreaming.

Consumption

A related trend from the same period is the exceptional outgrowth of consumer industries. These, too, went overseas. The perception that growth would last gave confidence to a later generation of Japanese who had no memories of scarcity from the 1940s and 1950s. An air of certainty felt in the climate of the bubble economy stimulated large-scale investment of surpluses in leisure industries. Across the world, Japanese capital was invested in theme parks, golf courses, luxury apartment blocks, expanded tourist operations and overseas resorts. An obsession for leisure time made consumption a priority in the lives of the working Japanese. The asceticism fostered in the pre-war years by governments keen on increasing the level of savings in the name of national growth was reversed. Consumption was the centrepiece of the new national strategy.⁵⁵ When the bubble economy slumped, so also did consumption levels.⁵⁶ However Japan's culture of consumption itself did not subside.

This presents an interesting scenario against which we can compare Castoriadis' and Arnason's theories. To carry out such a comparison I turn to John Clammer's anthropology of consumption in Japan. Clammer suggests that the domestication of capitalism's elemental significations is far from straightforward.⁵⁷ Clammer's contention is that the Japanese 'live within a much greater "closure" of social life'⁵⁸ and act that out in many different contexts. For instance, empirically there is strong evidence to support a view that in civic engagement and volunteerism obligations to others and to communities endures.⁵⁹ Likewise, the rituals of consumption are not straightforward. In this realm there is evidence that lasting networks of obligations shape lived

55 O'Brien. (2002). pp. 160–170.

56 Gao, B. (2001). *Japan's Economic Dilemma: The Institutional Origins of Prosperity and Stagnation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Also see Pempel, T.J. (2000). *Regime Shift: Comparative Dynamics of the Japanese Political Economy*. New York: Cornell University Press.

57 Clammer, J. (1997). *Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.

58 Clammer, J. (1995). *Difference and Modernity: Social Theory and Contemporary Japanese Society*. p. 6. London: Kegan Paul International.

59 (Haddad 2007; Vinken et al. 2010).

practice. Consumption in Japan is, of course, greatly excessive and can well seem affluent. Yet Clammer also perceives in consumption trends not only acts of the materialisation of desire but also occasions for ritualistic activation of social networks. Within the consumer mode of acting and interacting Clammer's anthropology suggests that the Japanese are able to construct a forceful sociality. There is a 'functional ambivalence' about consumption,⁶⁰ which revolves around a symbolic struggle to maintain network harmony. Consumption is therefore many-sided. It is commodified, to be sure. But it can also be a social activity that taps pre-given emotions about forms of relationality. The general sociology of consumption, of course, shows that consumption can mobilise deep emotions in a kind of 'reenchantment' of different cultural worlds;⁶¹ such stimulation of emotions is not exclusive to Japan. However, Japanese forms of relationality are particularly intense, context dependent and central to cultural expression.

At this point, emphasising a Maussian sensibility can accentuate aspects of the interpretation proffered by Clammer. The Japanese live out decidedly relational lives in which status and reciprocity are indispensable. In this context of deep relationalism, rituals such as shopping and gift-giving are opportunities for social experiences that provide emotional fulfilment and a constrained freedom.⁶² In a society with a reputation for requiring loyalty to the company and long hours of work and company-organised activities, exchange can renew selfhood. Gift-giving exemplifies this: it is primarily a ritualistic expression of status and less an accumulation of material goods (1997, pp. 15–19). It invokes a dynamic cycle of obligation and mutual indebtedness (*giri* and *on* are terms connoting such normative rituals of obligation).⁶³ Without doubt, all this is a trade in values in an intensely capitalist society. But acts of exchange here are multidimensional, and are often experienced as sociability and public display more than the commodification of life.⁶⁴ Thus the rituals associated with consumption affirm norms of sociability which intrude on the intemperance of hyper-consumption, even denying it primacy by introducing other kinds of meaning.

The potential of other kinds of meaning, including environmentalist sensibilities, for reshaping the commodity form is partially realised in active

60 (Clammer 1997, pp. 16–17).

61 Ritzer, G. (1999). *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.

62 Clammer J. (1997) pp. 68–83.

63 Clammer J. (1995) pp. 110–1.

64 Clammer J. (1997) pp. 88–95.

cooperative and consumer movements discussed below. Social movements of this kind have grown spectacularly by tapping ontological sensibilities about nature, place and habitation.⁶⁵ For Clammer, 'nature' is conceived in Japan as a world habitus.⁶⁶ The Japanese conceptualisation of place and world is contextual and therefore particular. The environment is understood, often tacitly, as ecology which humans truly inhabit and not as an opposite outside of human habitation. Augustin Berque too focuses on the Japanese ontology of the experience of nature and the ecological conception of human habitation.⁶⁷ Berque provides an explanation of the glaring paradox of a strong conception of environmental habitat coexisting with such an aggressively version of industrialism. The functionalisation and delocalisation of space in the course of the industrialisation of the country has permitted the ravages of the environment which have occurred on mainland Japan despite the strong ecological sensibilities in Japan's cultural ontology.

Cities exemplify this enduring paradox. Berque⁶⁸ argues that cities are vital sites that have been—historically-speaking—structured around an exceptionally ecological sense of being-in-the-world. Where Berque sees this acutely ecological sense lost from contemporary urban experiences due to the delocalisation of space, Clammer⁶⁹ argues that it continues in the living experiences of cities (rather than in the topographies which structure life as Berque argues). Similarly, Ben-Ari's ethnography of Japanese cities depicts highly resourceful communities that reproduce themselves through self-organisation. Despite the much-observed dreariness of the physical make-up of Japanese cities,⁷⁰ city life remains vibrant due to a high degree of "community consciousness."⁷¹

Citizens Movements

Villages, rural area and cities are all sites in which environmental consciousness manifests.⁷² Moreover, the sites of environmental consciousness are

65 Lam, P. (2011a).

66 Clammer, J. (1995) pp. 59–81.

67 Berque (1997).

68 Berque, A. (1993). *Japan: Cities and Social Bonds*. Northamptonshire: Pilkington Press.

69 Clammer, J. (1997).

70 Sorenson, A. (2002).

71 Ben-Ari, E. (1991). *Changing Japanese Suburbia: A Study of Two Present-Day Localities*. London: Kegan Paul International.

72 Sorenson, A. (2002) pp. 210–212.

also the settings in which the agency of residents' and citizens' movements is framed by the patterns of conflict and conflict resolution at work more widely.⁷³ In this context, social movement responses started to problematise the principle of the mastery of nature. Greater support from consumer cooperatives brought to the fore campaigns for nature preservation and a form of ethical consumption. Consumer cooperatives helped shift the focus to a wider conception of citizenship. This is evident in two ways: the scope of activism and environmental ethics. Social movements have moved from protesting local episodes of pollution to also contesting elections on green platforms. Comparative evidence (with the comparators being the US and Germany) strongly suggests that Japanese environmental consciousness at the start of the twenty-first century seems to be most apparent in both the urban activism and cooperativism of neighbourhood groups and in the popular vote for environmental candidates.⁷⁴ Expressions of this consciousness are situated deep in everyday life where social practices treasure immanence.⁷⁵ Consumer cooperatives realize an environmental ethics in the materiality of everyday life that is consistent with these practices,⁷⁶ while citizens-groups mobilise in the defence of the ecology of their worlds. It would be a mistake to see only parochialism in such consumer and activist coalitions. They engage in international networking with green groups around the world. An examination of the best known—the *Seikatsu* ('life') Club—shows more activity in the international arena, strong connections with NGOs and new labour concerns in the form of a workers' cooperative. Moreover, it has extensively sponsored environmental candidates in elections for different levels of government.⁷⁷ When tallied with strong votes for the environmental policies of other progressive parties, the combined results are firm evidence of an underlying alarm about environmental issues. It looks like a significant constituency of growing public opinion is at some variance with the logic of large-scale Japanese industrialism.

73 Eisenstadt, S.N. (1990). Patterns of Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Japan: Some Comparative Institutions. In Eisenstadt, S.N. and Ben-Ari, E. (Eds.). *Japanese Models of Conflict Resolution*. pp. 12–35. London: Kegan Paul International.

74 Schreurs, M.A. (2003). *Environmental Politics in Japan, Germany and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Also see Lam, P. (2011a). pp. 238–241. Also see Le Blanc, R. (1999). *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

75 Hasegawa, K. (2001) pp. 51–2.

76 Clammer, J. (2001). *Japan and Its Others: Globalisation, Difference and the Critique of Modernity*. pp. 156–157. Melbourne: Transpacific Press. Also see Lam, P. (1999). *Green Politics in Japan*. London: Taylor and Francis.

77 Lam, P. (1999). pp. 75–116. Also see Le Blanc, R. (1999). pp. 121–163.

Movements such as the *Seikatsu* Club therefore can be situated in relation to Castoriadis' conception of autonomy by positing them as partial practices of autonomy. Far from instituting an autonomous society, they infer the conditions of an autonomous existence and moderate the imaginary signification of rational mastery.⁷⁸ The fact that such practices are mounted in a notoriously consumer society indicates that commodification is never total and can never be. On the face of it this seems analogous to Castoriadis' claim that capitalism's tendency of reification 'can never be wholly realized' (1987: 16). Environmental movements both co-create and occupy everyday worlds in which consumption takes place.⁷⁹ Their presence, agency and impact acts to domesticate the elemental imaginary significations of capitalism. Whilst domesticating them, social movements circumscribe their meaning with an environmental ethics and a horizon of limitation that invokes 'autonomy' without realizing it.

Beyond Castoriadis, I therefore argue that this type of activism generates a living politics of self-limitation, even though it is enacted by, as Castoriadis would have it, heteronomous beings in a heteronomous society. Cooperativism and the citizens' movements against pollution enact limits which, in turn, complicate the materialisation of the imaginary significations of capitalism without withdrawing from it completely.

Conclusion

Castoriadis' project of autonomy—the other pole of modernity juxtaposed to rational mastery—can be represented in the Japanese case by the social movements. They do not enact 'autonomy' in the sense he normally intends, but they do articulate limits and self-limitation. As observed elsewhere.⁸⁰ Castoriadis's main notion of autonomy is too categorical to capture the nuances of living politics. Capitalism and its critical opposition coexist in a permanent tension that is mutually modifying, with each putting the other's organisational forms, disciplines and practices into question.

78 But see also Castoriadis (1981) on ecology in which he develops a more nuanced notion of autonomy. See also Adams (2012).

79 See Le Blanc (1999) on the multi-layered worlds of Japanese cities which are variously inhabited by housewife activists.

80 Arnason, J.P. (1989a) & (2001). Also see Doyle, N. (2012). Autonomy and Modern Liberal Democracy: From Castoriadis to Gauchet. In *European Journal of Social Theory* 15, 3: 1–17. Also see Wagner, P. (2001). "Modernity, Capitalism and Critique". *Thesis Eleven*, 66, 1–31.

The historical experience of Japanese modernity reflected in this chapter bears this out. The mania for growth in the post-war boom and the enchantment of science and consumption are dimensions of the Japanese institution in which the social imaginary significations of capitalism are grounded producing a distinctive variety of accumulation. Part of the distinctiveness of Japanese capitalism lies in the counter-weight to rational mastery generated by critique of capitalist developmentalism. The reform compelled by citizens and consumer movements to regulation of industry, firstly, and to consumer practices, secondly, with implications for the engagement of science and the modification of urban life have coexisted with the institution of capitalism and been partly absorbed into that very institution. At the same time, the social movements also infer imperatives of autonomy from critique of capitalism and the promotion of self-limitation. If social movements are to be considered exemplars of radical democracy, then it is through this inference of self-limitation of human powers as much as the practical results of their accumulated agency. Like the argument I am reflecting here about Castoriadis' project of autonomy, radical democracy's value may lie in the assertion of the variety of different kinds of living that do not conform to the rationalising impulse of the social imaginary significations of capitalism and thereby perpetually put them into question. This is not a problem that can be addressed here, but this chapter may contribute a perspective on Japan's distinct modernity relevant to the wider discussion.

Between Modernism and Postmodernism: Castoriadis and the Politics of Heterodox Marxism

Simon Tormey

I can always project a volume onto a plane, a figure onto an axis, the operation leaves me with some result in my hands; I cannot project social-historical life onto one its 'axes,' for the operation leaves me with nothing.¹

In her paper, 'The postmodern imagination', Agnes Heller outlines what to her are the characteristic differences between what she used to describe as 'forms of historical consciousness', in this case between 'the historical consciousness of unreflected generality' and 'the historical consciousness of reflected generality', or, more simply, between the 'modern' and 'postmodern' manner of thinking about ourselves, who we are and where we are going (if anywhere).² As Heller goes on to explain, the key difference between these forms of thinking is their respective stance on the formation of the subject under modern conditions. To the modern the subject is always-already known: enframed, enclosed by categories of existence, human need, essences and brute 'nature' or 'necessity'. The point of social critique is thus primarily to grasp a master code or metanarrative, to explain and account for Reality and the World within an overall account of the 'totality'. For the postmodern 'mind', on the other hand, the 'fact' of our 'contingency' or 'historicity' as subjects of modernity ensures that all such attempts at closure are doomed to fail. The modern subject eludes categorisation, definition, identity, or, to employ a banal but helpful formula, 'type casting'. As she notes: 'Postmoderns think and act as though everything (every historical event) were contingent in the strongest sense of the word (without plan, necessity, basic tendency, and so on), but they do not refer to contingency in ontological/metaphysical terms. They would never say that the essence of Being is contingent.'³

1 Castoriadis, C. (2005). Joyce, P. (ed.). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 220. (Electronic publication).

2 Heller, A. (2000). 'The postmodern imagination' *Politics at the Edge*. In C. Pierson and S. Tormey (Eds.). *The PSA Yearbook 1999*. pp. 1–13. London: Macmillan.

3 Heller, 'postmodern imagination', p. 4.

'Postmodern' in this sense has nothing to do with the 'time after', with *posthistoire* or the end of history; far from it. The key phrase above is '[p]ost-moderns think and act'. What we are discussing are ways of thinking about the nature of the world and the individuals that compose it, that create it, that make the world what it is. To be 'postmodern' is to take a stance *on* the modern; it is not to think that the modern has somehow 'ceased to exist', or that modernity with all its 'effects' has been displaced by some other experience of temporality. It is in particular to think of 'the subject' neither as 'dead' nor as a mere '*träger*' of some foreordained logic or imperative. It is to consider the bearer of his or her own *energeia*. To 'be' postmodern thus implies a particular form of *praxis* stemming from the recognition of 'absolute responsibility' in the here-and-now, a responsibility which as Heller adds is 'absolute' because it stems from the belief in—rather than knowledge of—the contingent nature of action and our place in the world.

Attempting to grapple with the vexed issue of the legacy of Castoriadis it occurs to me that Heller's description of the dominant forms of consciousness of modernity as we live it help us to come to terms with the puzzling or disconcerting manner in which his political philosophy relates to his social theory and account of subjectivity. Castoriadis is very obviously a libertarian thinker: 'libertarianism' shines off every page and word he ever wrote. Yet there sometimes seem to be two kinds of libertarianism present in his work, one of a 'modernist' kind and one of a 'postmodernist' kind—in the senses used by Heller in the passages above. Another way of putting the same point is that there is a libertarianism that speaks to the contemporary subject of 'the political' and there is another that speaks to those who cannot detect the irony present when political theorists outline in precise terms what it is to be 'free', how 'free' people live, and what kind of institutions and structures 'free' people need or want. In Castoriadis, we see both an 'archaic' (both literally and metaphorically) form of political theorising juxtaposed with the most extraordinary prescience which allows him to foreshadow developments and issues in contemporary social and political critique. One form of libertarianism is of interest insofar as it represents a contribution to the literature of libertarian socialisms (or perhaps classical anarchisms); the other represents a resource for careful scrutiny, reflection and contemplation by all those who wish to develop and enhance a left radical critique of the 'social-historical' *a priori*. I take *The Imaginary Institution of Society* to be the principal resource for the development of the latter which is why it forms the centre-piece for discussion in this paper.

It should be added immediately that in advancing this reading, (a modern/postmodern Castoriadis) I do not want to claim that this makes Castoriadis

or his work 'postmodernist', not the perspective he offers one that has much to do with 'postmodernism' as that term is commonly deployed. I take it that Castoriadis would agree with Heller's account of 'postmodernism' which is to say that as an 'ism', 'postmodernism' is—if not a self-contradiction—then another 'crutch' for those who find it impossible to live without the warm certainties afforded by privileged insight into the nature of the social and historical.⁴ This does not describe the work of Castoriadis who had no need for 'crutches' of any kind to sustain his intellectual endeavours. My claim is mostly linked to a point implicit in the quote from Heller above which concerns the character of left radical thought and aspirations under 'postmodern' conditions, that is, under conditions in which the faith or belief in modernist 'solutions' to our 'problems' has dissipated, where people increasingly feel that no 'metanarrative' can possibly encompass the totality of their lived experience, where identity is becoming more not less fractured, and thus where the experience of 'radical contingency' is one increasingly shared by ordinary people, not just by intellectuals whose own existential rootlessness might be thought as predisposing them to identify with the work of Rilke and Sartre. Under such conditions, the continued validity of Castoriadis's work is dependent on our seeing in him a thinker with a great deal to say about what a radical politics might look like and be like for 'postmoderns'.

Castoriadis and the Modern Imagination

Castoriadis was an uncompromising radical, indeed a self-declared revolutionary even in an age such as our own when such a declaration rings if not hollow then with the faintest of metallic notes. Castoriadis was also a libertarian and as self-conscious about the potential for libertarianism to become authoritarian as Orwell or any other commentator on the issue. Yet in reading Castoriadis and of course in particular the early Castoriadis of the 1950s it is difficult not to be struck by the degree of certainty and self-confidence with which his pronouncements are made. Of course, some of this is dictated by the needs of a 'revolutionary' politics. Few people would be impressed by a revolutionary who professes to doubts about the exact nature of the failings of the existing system and by extension the virtues of the system to be created. Yet nonetheless the sheer stridency of the declarations easily match those of Bakunin or

4 See for example the vituperative comments on the subject in Castoriadis, 'The retreat from autonomy: postmodernism as generalized conformism' Castoriadis, C. (1997). *World in Fragments*. pp. 32–43. Stanford CA: University of Stanford Press.

Lenin in terms of the forcefulness with which they are put and the sense of certainty with which they are expressed. I was struck in particular by the following passage from 1957 essay 'On the content of socialism II' the mere title of which bespeaks of one confident not only in the necessity for change, but also in the precise *form* that that change must take, its 'content'. Here, for example, he declares that:

In accordance with the deepest aspirations of the working class, production 'norms' (in their present meaning) will be abolished, and complete equality in wages will be instituted . . . Labour discipline will be the discipline imposed by each group of workers upon its own members . . . The integration of particular individual activities into a whole will be accomplished basically[!] by the cooperation of various groups of workers or shops. It will be the object of the workers' permanent and ongoing coordinating activity. The essential universality of modern production will be freed from the concrete experience of particular jobs and will be formulated by meetings of workers.⁵

Even granted the perhaps judicious placing of two ellipses, the above passage contains seven incidences of the word 'will', proof if anything of Castoriadis's faith in the 'future perfect'. It might of course be argued that this is an early work and so can be expected to reflect the optimism generated by events in Hungary which had an enormous impact on Castoriadis. It comes as something of a shock then to find the same degree of certainty expressed in his writings of the 1970s, i.e. at a point when not only has he rejected Marxism as a totalising world view, but when his own view of the possibilities afforded by radical action seem to be at their lowest ebb. Thus, on the one hand, Castoriadis can be found repeatedly lamenting the absence of the form of radical energy which underpinned an earlier generation of political activity idealised for him in the Hungarian revolution. Contemporary 'culture' (and by extension the contemporary subject) is 'exhausted', 'paralysed', 'withered', and prospects for fundamental renewal and reimagining seem thin on the ground. As Castoriadis intones in the opening lines of the 1979 essay 'Social transformation and cultural creation', 'I have weighed these times and found them wanting'.⁶ Yet Canute-like in the face of

5 Castoriadis, C. (1988). 'On the content of socialism II', *Cornelius Castoriadis: Political and Social Writings*. p. 102. In David Ames Curtis (Ed.), vol. 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

6 Castoriadis, C. (1993). 'Social, transformation and cultural creation' *Cornelius Castoriadis: Political and Social Writings*. In David Ames Curtis (Ed.), vol. 3, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

the apathy and degeneracy of his own constituency ('the people'), Castoriadis finds solace through offering schemes and blueprints of ever-increasing radicality so that, for example, in the essays of the same period 'Self-management and hierarchy' and 'Socialism and autonomous society' Castoriadis reaffirms, indeed augments the schemes of the sort associated with the 'On the content of socialism' essays with Proudhonian sentiments of such unblinking radicalism that one is for the briefest of moments inclined to treat them as impatient outbursts rather than the measured thoughts of a serious political theorist.⁷ Here, Castoriadis rejects the idea of remuneration according to desert, merit or other 'value' driven criteria. More than this, he rejects remuneration according to any formula which pays any attention at all to the outcome of work, to its utility for others, to the needs it serves or satisfies. The existence of income differentials he tells us are really only a reflection of the importance placed in existing society on hierarchy and one's position relative to others. 'If', he argues, 'one can make ten thousand dollars a month rather than one thousand, and if the social system everywhere nourishes the idea that he who makes ten thousand is worth more than or is better than he who makes only one thousand—then indeed many people . . . will be motivated to do everything to make ten thousand rather than one thousand.'⁸ As he goes on to note: if one day we look at the desire to make more money as irrational as wanting an hereditary or noble title, then this would completely undercut the desirability or necessity of income differentials. Value change would lead to change in social practice which, by extension, would lead to more or less absolute equality of outcome with all the 'positive' ramifications that such a change implies for the project of creating an autonomous society. The fact that Castoriadis can find little evidence to suggest that such a change in values is imminent, but just the contrary (see the essay 'Social transformation' mentioned above) merely confirms the radical character of the changes that will have to be effected in order to bring about the kind of society he thinks we need. Indeed we can note here that it is a curious though persistent feature of Castoriadis's writings that the more fanciful and unlikely a scenario appears to be under current conditions, the more such a scenario has to be defended and indeed extolled. Radicalism is it seems a virtue in itself, for it points to the continuing fertility of the source of social change—the imagination. It thus seems to follow that the more radical any given 'break' with existing society is the better, for the more radical a given proposal the more it draws for its sustenance on the crystalline purity of the 'eidetic' properties lurking within the imaginary. A Proudhonian scheme

7 The essays can be found at pp. 216–26 and pp. 314–30 of the third volume of *Political and Social Writings*.

8 *Political and Social Writings* III, p. 224.

of income equalisation is thus to be supported and advanced as much for the distance that would be have to be travelled in order to make such a proposal a reality as for the particular virtue of the scheme in preparing the way for its political counterpoint: a Rousseauian polity in which, as Castoriadis unceasingly reminds us, the condition of freedom is absolute material equality.

We are as even the above notes indicate in the presence of a modern 'imagination'. The confidence in the coming-to-be of the autonomous society may diminish but there remains at the very least a weak metanarrative which involves charting the progressive attempts of humanity to impose its collective imagination on the social-historical. Familiar dates are dispensed to reassure us of the ever-presence of the struggle for control over ourselves: 1871, 1917, 1936, 1953, 1956, 1968 and on (and on). 'Castoriadians' have no doubt added 1999 (Seattle) to the list of cherished dates, dates which tell us not to give up faith, not to throw in the towel as we await the upsurge that will cast off 'all the old rubbish'. Castoriadis's belief that he has captured the content and form of autonomy, how it is to be realised and under what conditions is undiminished. All that is lacking is the will or desire of ordinary people to 'make/do' the project he describes. And this is the worrying feature of Castoriadis in his guise as a modernist libertarian, for ultimately his disappointment in the increasing shortfall between his vision and the state of existing society translates as a disappointment with us, with humanity in general. We increasingly fail to live up to the high expectations he has of us and the potential it is possible for us to tap individually and collectively. It is this disappointment which allows him—in the course (let it not be forgotten) of a *critique* of the totalising tendencies of Marxian revolutionary theory—to add nonchalantly that the 'transformation of society' or 'instauration of the autonomous society' is a process that can only be achieved on the basis of 'anthropological mutation', a change in the substance and form of the 'anthropos' itself, of us as human beings.⁹ Such a change is needed so that we can see for example how irrational it is to for me to want more pay than my neighbour, for me to want a faster car, indeed *any* car. Existing individuals cannot be the subject of a radical political programme; they cannot be its addressees but must somehow 'change' first for the project to advance. Cold War liberals used to call the expression of such sentiments 'totalitarian'; today and in the context of this discussion we can call it the expression of a very 'modernist' libertarianism.

9 Political and Social Writings III, p. 328.

Elements of a 'Postmodern Imagination'

What, however, makes Castoriadis such a fascinating figure for those interested in the renewal of left radical critique is that his work also speaks to our contemporary fear of theoretical and thus political totalisation, of a final closure leading to the elimination of the very substance, 'autonomy', we are trying to enlarge. It should be added that even when presenting his modernist 'face' it is difficult not to detect the smirk of someone who likes to provoke a reaction in his or her audience through stating the outrageous. This tactic of 'outrageous confrontation' is of course part of the broader strategy Castoriadis is interested in exploring, which is showing that what exists does not exist through necessity but through human creation. The love of provocation is one of Castoriadis's most endearing qualities as a theorist; but it is one that can, as my comments above indicate, lend themselves to a 'naïve' (i.e. Cold War liberal) reading as well as the 'ironical' reading that detects the smirk beneath the heartfelt radicalism. So much for the 'programmatic' Castoriadis, the Castoriadis always/already engaged in a personal 'war of interpretation' with the guardians of orthodox Marxism and the central committees of world communism. For the other Castoriadis, we need to move to *The Imaginary Institution of Society* the key resource for a 'postmodern' reading of his political and social thought.

The Imaginary Institution of Society is of course a dazzling work of great vigour and subtlety, though if we include in our assessment of it the essay 'Marxism and Revolutionary Theory' then the continuities with other works are still pronounced. It is, however, the second essay 'The Institution and the Imaginary' where I feel Castoriadis gives us some clues as to ways in which we can begin to retheorise the political and escape the totalisations of ideological politics, and where in a sense Castoriadis tells us how to get beyond the limitations imposed as much by his own political perspective as by the necessities of a revolutionary politics. As with most great contributions to a theoretical literature I take the core message of the second essay to be an essentially simple one, or rather one whose message can be rendered simply even if the ramifications which derive from it may take considerable care and reflection to unpack. The message it seems is this: that although we can explain some forms of human behaviour by reference to historical and ahistorical variables, we will never be able to explain all human behaviour in this way. Although we can explain and analyse social phenomena on the basis of observable patterns of interaction and development, we will never be able finally to explain why it is that such patterns came about in the manner in which they did in the context in which they did. Thus, 'there is no articulation of social life that is given once and for all, neither on the surface nor at greater depth, neither really, nor

abstractly'.¹⁰ Furthermore, although we might feel that on the basis of explanatory theorems, descriptions and analyses we are in a good position to say how and under what conditions history develops, we will never be able finally to encapsulate the origin of the historical, nor indeed its *telos*. History has rather to be thought of as 'the emergence of radical otherness, immanent creation, non-trivial novelty'.¹¹ The reason is that what accounts for the being-thus of the human is 'ontological genesis', 'poeisis, not imitative poetry' or '*eidos*, the capacity to begin and initiate'.¹²

Like Arendt, who interestingly is not mentioned in the course of the text but whose analysis of the issue in *The Human Condition* expresses very similar sentiments, to understand who we are eventually provokes the issue of 'natality', the beginning. Yet whereas in Arendt to prompt the question of why exactly it is that 'natality' is different to other forms of creation is to tread on the very soul of the human, to invoke the metaphysical essence of being, Castoriadis remains undaunted by the quest for, as it were, the origin of 'the origin', the character of the 'ineffable'. The brilliance of the analysis of this section of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* reflects the brilliance of an intellect which regards the passing over of key questions concerning subjectivity and sociality as an act of betrayal, yet which is prepared to accept that all essentialisms are in a sense implicated in the process of social determination and the creation of new necessities. The compromise, a 'non-essentialist essentialism' or, perhaps an 'essentialist non-essentialism' is ingenious yet devastating. At its core is of course the idea of the irreducibility of individual thought, social life and the historical to a first 'cause'. All we can do it in a sense to locate the space/moment of the origin in the 'magma' which as the term implies is protean, shifting, unpredictable, for its content or form is not determined in advance by *anything*, but by the unknowable psyche. It is from this observation that we get the following resounding account of the deficiencies of 'identitary-ensemblist' thinking that insists that social phenomena must be reduced to core or elemental 'physical' properties. In short, it is from this observation that we get an idea of the limits of the 'science of man' on the one hand and a sense of the infinitude of human thought and action on the other. As he notes,

Nothing, in any society whatsoever... exists that is not at one and the same time the inconceivable presence of what is no longer and the just

10 Castoriadis, C. (1987). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. p. 180. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

11 *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 184.

12 *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, pp. 3–4.

as inconceivable immanence of what is not yet... The actual existence of the social is always internally dislocated or... constituted in itself by what is outside of itself... The dimensionality of the social-historical is not a 'framework' in which the social-historical is spread out and in which it unfolds; it is itself the mode of self-unfolding of the social-historical. For the social-historical is, or comes into existence as a figure hence as spacing, and as the otherness-alteration of the figure, temporality.¹³

The language may be very different but the sentiments expressed here and in the following chapter (5—The Social Historical Institution, *Legein* and *Teukhein*) seem similar to those which animated the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein—again (we can note) a philosopher unmentioned in the text but whose presence seems palpable in the second essay. Like Wittgenstein, Castoriadis is passionately defensive about the interiority of language and by extension of social life. Society, he states, 'defines its own universe of discourse', its own 'reality' or 'world of signification'.¹⁴ Language does not point at something in the world; it 'creates a world'. Language therefore 'presupposes itself' rather than something which is exterior to itself. At the same time what has to be resisted is the idea that the form of language determines the content of what can be said. Language is the medium of communication, of instituting/signifying; but it does determine *what* is said or instituted. As Castoriadis mordantly puts it, we are not 'talking machines', but creators of meaning and sense. We are poets, it is just that some have the chance to realise their 'poetic' sides whereas others are condemned to suppress it lest it suggest that what is should be otherwise.

Merely to type these sentences is to be overwhelmed with a sense of how different this writing feels, how different Castoriadis's mood is when compared for example with the quotations in the previous section. In place of the tireless certainties of one in possession of universal panaceas for humanity's ills here we have an account of society of culture, of human activity that is so respectful of 'difference' and the uniqueness of cultural creation that it seems curious to think of them as having anything to do with Castoriadis the post-Enlightenment universalist. Indeed such is the distance travelled that it seems worth exploring the connection to Wittgenstein, a philosopher who was of course determined to 'teach differences' to those who would insist on the necessity to think in terms of the totality. Castoriadis' discussion, for example, of language at pp. 237–9 seems to invoke a similar scepticism concerning the

13 The Imaginary Institution of Society, p. 219.

14 The Imaginary Institution of Society, p. 234.

unity of thought and experience to the section in Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* where the way in which even arithmetic gains its validity and use in connection with culturally specific forms of activity. Here he explains that (contra Frege and Russell) mathematics does not describe the properties of the world (its 'foundations'), but is itself part of a world and thus 'different' according to the needs and uses it has within different contexts and amongst different peoples.¹⁵ Wittgenstein describes why we it might be regarded as 'logical' that for example wood cutters sell their wood according to volume as volume is for us the operative notion of 'amount' that is relevant to wood. Yet as his ensuing analysis makes clear, the notions being used here of 'logic' and 'amounts of' already presuppose a certain understanding of the world specific to certain cultures and forms of life. As the discussion has a bearing not only on the content of difference/alterity, but also on the politics of difference/alterity I want to quote it at length:

§147. Those people—we should say—sell timber by cubic measure—but are they right in doing so? Wouldn't it be more correct to sell it by weight—or by the time that it took to fell the timber—or by the labour of felling measured by the age and strength of the woodsman? And why should they not hand it over for a price which is independent of all this: each buyer pays the same however much he takes (they have found it possible to live like that). And is there anything to be said against simply giving the wood away?

§148. Very well; but what if they piled the timber in heaps of arbitrary, varying height and then sold it at a price proportionate to the area covered by the piles?

And what if they even justified this with the words: 'Of course, if you buy more timber, you must pay more'?

§149. How could I shew them that—as I should say—you don't really buy more wood if you buy a pile covering a bigger area?—I should, for instance, tackle a pile which was small by their ideas and, by laying the logs around, change it into a 'big' one. This might convince them—but perhaps they would say: 'Yes, now it's a lot of wood and costs more'—and that would be the end of the matter.—We should presumably say in this case: they simply

15 Wittgenstein, L. (1967). *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

do not mean the same by 'a lot of wood' and 'a little wood' as we do; and they have a quite different system of payment from us.¹⁶

What the above passage amplifies at a descriptive level is what Castoriadis appears to mean when he says that society should not be seen in 'functional' terms, and indeed that functionality, 'rationality', the 'reasonable' are all concepts interior to a particular way of understanding the world, a particular set of significations.¹⁷ Thus in the above example the manner by which in §149 the wood cutters measure 'amounts' looks to us plainly irrational or 'insane', as Frege described those who doubt the rationality of mathematics. Yet Wittgenstein's point is that it looks so from the point of view of 'our' maths, our view of the world and reality. In 'another' world the measuring of quantities in such a fashion corresponds to a different 'functionality' or rationality, and one which as §149 shows, we might not even have the resources to defend. 'Otherness' here really is alterity: the 'beyond' of being/acting 'differently' to the point where our forms of explanation and description are genuinely of little use to us. 'Why do the wood cutters measure amounts in this way?'. If I answered the question by saying, 'I just don't know', then I get close to the concept of otherness which is implied in the idea of 'functionality' being interior to a given world or reality. What is therefore explicit in Wittgenstein's analysis is the notion that there is no way of judging or deciding between the rationality/functionality of different systems of signification, and this way of thinking about the 'otherness' of cultural and social signification is I think implicit in Castoriadis's otherwise similar analysis. As such it is an important resource for defending a 'postmodern' reading of his work for what it underlines is the uniqueness and irreducibility of collective imaginaries. The world of the wood cutters is to be read in this sense not as a pale or diminished example of 'civilisation' ('those idiot natives') nor as merely a more backward form of life than our own, but as a world unique in itself, and as a world among other worlds—not less complete, not more backward: but separate and 'equal'. Nor are such worlds to be thought of as 'constellations' or part of patterns through which we can position them in relation to others. 'Uniqueness' in this sense is a not a relational concept ('unique insofar as others are not the same'), but an absolute concept ('unique as unprecedented') which relates to the notion of cultural and social creation as 'poiesis'.

The effect of such a reading is thus to preserve the integrity of social constructions, to insist that it be judged and assessed by standards interior to

16 Wittgenstein, *Remarks*, s. I, pp. 147–8 (pp. 43–4).

17 The Imaginary Institution of Society, p. 135.

themselves. Woodcutters are not to be judged 'insane' because they count or calculate on a different basis to us; but as 'different' or rather as employing a different system of calculation to our own for different purposes and ends. It is a view of culture that explicitly rejects the imperialism of identity-ensamblist thought, of 'totalities' and linear histories in favour of a view that looks positively on the rich diversity of cultural signification and which by extension seeks to preserve that diversity as evidence of the 'poetic' nature of human self-formation that it does not conform to any 'law of development', necessity or exterior determination. Diversity is analogous to beauty as *poiesis*, and as such is a value in itself. Here, then is a view that is unashamed to recognise the bounded horizons of the perspective giving rise to the analysis and thus which is prepared to respect the interiority of the worlds it is seeking to comprehend. As such it seems a promising basis for a politics of mutual respect and recognition, values which, as Castoriadis's treatment of the issue in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* implies, we should be concerned to uphold and defend.

This notion of difference/equality not only underpins the notion of the social, but in Castoriadis the position of the individual as the ontological 'subject' of *eidos* and thus potentially at least as co-creator of a 'world' to which he or she would otherwise seem subject. 'Worlds' are not in this sense to be theorised as a static ensemble, but as dynamic—again as is implied in the notion of social signification as a 'magma'. What accounts for the fluid properties of social signification is the subject who is interjected into the social, but who is not determined or 'held' by the system. The subject is active (re)creator of the system and thus 'responsible' for its reproduction. In this sense the equality of worlds implied in the comments in the preceding paragraph applies to the equality of the subject as 'doer'. As Castoriadis puts it, '*legein* implies and brings it about that every individual has the same value as any other individual in the collectivity considered, with respect to *legein*: stands for any other, serves for the collective utilization of *legein*'.¹⁸ It is this notion of individual as active in relation to the system of signification that leads Castoriadis to be so critical of the dominant philosophical paradigms which have with few exceptions (on his reading) insisted that the subject is essentially passive in relation to signification/representation and thus that some foundation has to be found for a necessity that remains outside the 'doing'/'making' of conscious subjects. This sense of the passivity of the subject is in his view only a reflection of the contingent, social-historical 'realities' that have for centuries posited the construction of meaning as either beyond the grasp of the temporal altogether (as

18 The Imaginary Institution of Society, p. 255.

'God' given or in the form of Natural Law etc.) or as the task of some specific class or group of 'far-sighted' individuals to perform. And here of course the origin of Castoriadis's critique of Marxism as attempting to define 'making/doing' or *praxis* in relation to the historically constituted role of the proletariat, for which we read the Party. Marxism arrogates the definition of the world to revolutionary *praxis* but that *praxis* is itself defined in relation to material conditions thereby excluding those who by virtue of their class identity cannot be described as 'proletarian'. What should be an activity shared in common therefore becomes the basis for the justification of exclusion from the process whereby the social is reimagined and redefined.

The libertarian sentiments underpinning the argument therefore seem unarguable, for the creation of social signification cannot according to Castoriadis be posited as a 'task' which only some are qualified to carry out, so much as the ontological expression of what it is to be human. We create our world—or rather we *recreate* our world, whereas we *should* be creating it, self-consciously with others, *collectively* in a process of 'objective reflexivity'. We should create the world because the world is a human creation and we are human. Moreover, creation should be on the basis of the 'radical imaginary' as opposed to the dominant imaginaries that have served hitherto the content and form of social life that determines human life: reality should be determined by 'phantasy' and novelty, not the 'dead weight' of human history, of tradition and consensus, received truths and the 'wisdom of the ages'. The radical imaginary would thus recuperate or 'recover' that which rightly belongs to us: our capacity to shape social signification through the expression of our 'madness', the 'uncontrollable other' or 'primordial' eidetic properties lurking within the psyche. In doing so it would render 'the world' subject to those who compose the world; it would overcome our alienation from the world—'the concealment of the being of society from its own egos, covering over its essential temporality'.¹⁹ 'Hitherto existing history' thus becomes the history of concealment of the world from the subjects of the world. With 'the revolution' comes the democratisation and universalisation of 'making/doing' and with it the overcoming of representation as repressed. Thus, it is the ontologically rooted nature of 'genesis' that provides the normative validity for the critique of heteronomy and the pursuit of autonomy in social life. We should participate in the creation/recreation of the world because we (i.e. each one of us) is an author of the world even if we have been convinced by those with an interest in denying our ontological essence that the world is created 'elsewhere'. Denying this common ownership

19 The Imaginary Institution of Society, p. 372.

of the world as heteronomy does, is to deny what it is to be human. We need to recover 'the world' in order to recover our humanity.

'Woodcutters of the world unite . . .'

Even in enumerating the ways in which the individual could 'participate' in the creation of the world it is difficult not to think that Castoriadis creates more problems than he solves and that the political project he wishes to advance, certainly within *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, i.e. emancipation as the recuperation of the process of signification, represents what might be termed a hyper-extension of the notion of 'participation' to the point where the term begins to lose meaning—consciously 'constructed' or otherwise—and thus any political 'purchase'. My worry is that in doing so he undermines or undercuts the crucial arguments concerning the nature of the relationship between particular and universal which I take to be implicit in his analysis of the social creation of signification and thus to undermine the 'postmodern' element of his critique.

The most evident difficulty with the argument enumerated above is to think in terms of the symbolic order as something to which I relate either 'passively' or 'actively', as someone who 'merely' reproduces it or as someone who 'helps' produce it. In our discussion of Wittgenstein's example above the social ground of arithmetic, of the manner in which amounts for example are deployed and thought about is as Castoriadis argues, established through particular forms of individual and social practice. 'Our' maths differs from the maths of the wood cutters not because the latter's is more primitive or backward but because their way of life and thus their use of mathematical concepts differs radically from our own. They have no need for our kind of 'precision', our way of looking at quantity, or our way of apportioning objects according to certain mathematical concepts. But would we then say that they have a 'passive' or 'active' relationship to the concepts that compose their local system of calculation, to 'their' maths? It is passive in the sense that their way of calculating reflects the way they relate to the world, which in turn is learned in the process of being socialised into the community of wood cutters. It is active in the sense that the system is used 'self-consciously' or 'deliberately' rather than accidentally or even involuntarily. The woodcutters are not, to paraphrase Castoriadis, 'calculating machines' who unconsciously add and subtract; adding and subtracting is rather an activity that has practical use in their lives and thus which helps them to organise their world. What the woodcutters do not seem to be lacking however is some sense of 'control' over the mathematical concepts they use to organise their life and work. Indeed such a notion surely runs counter to

what it is that a maths—*any* sort of maths—is namely, a system of ‘accepted’ concepts and procedures for organising a particular feature or aspect of ‘reality’. The more one thinks about the notion of ‘control’ in such a context the more bizarre it becomes. Would we say for example that the woodcutters would be demonstrating the ‘autonomous’ character of their form of life if they met, say, once a month to discuss alternative ways of imagining how calculations could be performed, how ‘quantity’ could be expressed, and so forth? Perhaps they would: it is certainly true that they would be ‘in control’ of a part of the ‘system of social signification/representation’; they would, that is, be translating a merely ‘passive’ relation to their own forms of calculation, and thereby satisfying the ‘making/doing’ criteria that determines whether or not we can consider them as being ‘autonomous’ in this regard. The question, however, would be whether committing themselves to such deliberations would actually result in an extension of control over their lives; whether the forms of autonomy being ‘generated’ help them really to control the terms of their existence rendering that which was previously ‘heteronomous’ autonomous and open to view. How, in short, has the life of the collective been enhanced as a result of this collective ‘participation’ in the definition of ‘the world’ or at least the element of the world to which ‘maths’ corresponds? Of course it is open to us to make the point that debating or coming together is a good thing in itself even if the content of what is being debated appears to be of secondary importance, but this is not Castoriadis’s point, at least not in the context of the discussion in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*.²⁰ What he wants, rather, is to recuperate the ‘lost’ ground of *legein* and *teukhein* of ‘making/doing’ through the extension of collective control over the process of social signification. He wants in other words to wrestle the process by which our ‘world’ is defined and created off ‘elites’ (however defined or constructed) and put it back into the hands of the individuals acting through the collective. Yet so far it is not clear that the creation of ‘worlds’ can be rendered in terms of the form of intentional activity Castoriadis suggests, and thus it is not clear what could be gained by insisting that autonomy equates to opening up the process of conceptual and symbolic ‘creation’ to popular ‘participation’.

20 I think Castoriadis does actually think that the coming together of the community is important and intrinsic to autonomy. Indeed his comments on the superiority of the Athenian way of life are often in the form of praise for the sense of community and solidarity which extends from physically meeting together as a community. The content of what is being discussed, the content of the political often seems accidental in this regard. See for example the essay ‘The Greek and the Modern political imaginary’ in *World in Fragments*, pp. 84–107.

This is such a key element of the overall discussion in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* that we have to consider the possibility that it is the example being used above rather than the logic of Castoriadis's arguments that is the source of the problem. Let us imagine then that it is not mathematical concepts he has in mind, but language more generally (there are certainly enough passages in the text to support this interpretation). Here the argument would be that we are in general subject to concepts or to a system of social or symbolic signification over which we exercise no control. Perhaps in this sense what Castoriadis implies here is essentially similar to the critique advanced by Chomsky in his analysis of 'thought control' in democratic systems or by Marcuse in his account of 'affirmative language' in *One Dimensional Man*. Both make similar sounding points to Castoriadis. Both, that is, stress the way in which interpretations and meanings of words are manipulated by the media and by extension the ruling elite in its own interests. So words like 'democracy', 'freedom' and 'totalitarianism' are routinely used in a certain way to underscore a particular view of the world which accords with the interests and ideology of those concerned with maintaining the status quo. Control of 'meaning' and 'signification' are thus intrinsic to the operation of domination in advanced industrial society and thus the more the generation of meaning can be 'democratised' the greater the prospects for radical change would become—or so the argument goes. What is noticeable in their account is the idea of challenging the hegemony of certain forms of discourse as a means to the end of social change. With social change and in particular the democratisation of social, economic and political life comes in turn a change in social signification so that the 'language' and forms of meaning generated are in accordance with the priorities and values of ordinary people rather than the global corporations which currently exercise control over the media and thus over the 'language' of politics. Yet despite surface similarities with the argument being advanced by Castoriadis, there is an important difference which concerns the manner and form of social change and 'participation'. I take it that Chomsky's and Marcuse's interest in the process whereby social signification is generated concerns the *means* whereby change can come about rather than the *ends* to be achieved by that change. For them the value of, as it were, recuperating the process whereby meaning or signification is generated lies in terms of challenging the 'givenness' of existing social institutions and suggesting alternative models of social life. It is to politicise and bring into question what would otherwise appear a fixed and immutable horizon of discourse. We have to challenge the 'dominant' meaning of the term 'democracy' for example, because only by doing so will we encourage people to think that there is a gap between the promise and reality of democratic practice and thus that radical change is needed to narrow the gap. What neither proposes is that the means becomes

the end, which is to say that the 'control' or 'democratisation' of social signification is posited as the goal of an emancipatory process and the *content* of participatory deliberation in any future self-determining society.

Even with 'help' from Chomsky and Marcuse Castoriadis's schema still appears to lack plausibility on the particular issue of the content of 'participation' and the creation and recreation of worlds. And yet my feeling is that the confusion is an almost wholly avoidable one, and I think returning (for the last time!) to the woodcutters might help to unpack the source of the difficulty. Clearly there *are* different forms of autonomy that the woodcutters could value on the basis of the information Wittgenstein supplies. There is the 'autonomy' that Castoriadis speaks of which we considered above, namely the right to debate and deliberate on the nature of the concepts they use, how their conceptual 'world' is to be constituted. As I intimated above, I'm not sure Castoriadis gives us compelling reasons for thinking that this is a form of 'autonomy' which would answer people's need to exercise self-determination over their lives—always assuming that such a demand really is as 'universal' as Castoriadis evidently thinks it is. There is, however, another form of autonomy to which Wittgenstein alludes directly in §147 where he asks whether the woodcutters are 'right' to sell their wood on the basis of volume and thus whether it would not be 'more correct' for them to sell or distribute their wood on some other basis. This seems a much more substantive matter with more far reaching ramifications for the manner in which the woodcutters live than is the issue of deciding how calculations will be performed. Here after all what Wittgenstein is pointing at is the issue of who controls the wood, how it should be disposed of according to which norms of distribution. Here, therefore, it is easy to see why the woodcutters would *want* to have control over such issues because depending on the available options they will exercise greater or lesser power over their own work and the products of it, over how much they will earn or not, and over what kind of relations they will have with the 'consumers' of wood and, indeed, with 'society' more generally. The issue of the manner in which the wood is disposed of has far-reaching ramifications for the wood cutters' form of life, and it is precisely because they are far-reaching that we can imagine them wanting to be a part of the discussions concerning 'the political economy of wood' in their society. Surely it is *this* kind of autonomy left radicals should be interested in rather than that which involves an endless reconceptualisation and rethinking of the symbolic order, as if we literally lacked the words we need to mount a struggle against the social, economic and political given. In other words it is autonomy as the recovery or recuperation of *power* in its social, economic and political dimensions, the power to shape and determine those aspects of our life that have a bearing on how and under what conditions we live that would seem to get to the heart of the matter. It is the

power to say what the content of autonomy is, how autonomy is to be achieved or improved, and what institutions and processes will have to be developed in order to resolve the forms of contestation and antagonism which may result in the wake of the opening up of the sort of questions faced by the woodcutters to public deliberation. Certainly in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* such questions seem to have been relegated to some other domain of life or activity, perhaps in order not to sully the poetical content of the process where our world is reconceived. The vision of autonomy seems, paradoxically an apolitical autonomy, which is perhaps to say that in the end it is a very 'modernist' form of autonomy in which fundamental contestation—including of course the question of what 'autonomy' is—has somehow been resolved in the course of the 'revolution'.

My fear, therefore, is that Castoriadis's vision of autonomy is the answer to a 'problem' which is not so much insuperable as tangential to the issues of control and determination which rightly animate other aspects of his political thought. Castoriadis is right to emphasise the contingency and historicity of systems of signification, but to infer from this fact that they should be self-consciously subject to 'autonomous' rule is to assume that there is some special significance to disclosing the identity of the 'authors' of systems of signification and indeed that 'authorial' control over such a process is something to which we should assign priority in thinking about how autonomy can be extended and augmented. I think Castoriadis shows brilliantly the social basis of signification, but his attempt to root 'the social' in ontology, in the capacity of individuals to generate meaning or significance lacks credibility considered either as a basis for understanding how signification/representation is created or as a basis for understanding the origins of heteronomy, of *rule* by others. This is not the same as saying that Castoriadis is wrong about the crucial role the psyche plays or could play in explaining the origin of signification. Indeed I prefer Castoriadis's dynamic account of the 'origins' of signification to that associated with, for example, some of Wittgenstein's followers (for example Winch) where the concept of 'society' or culture sometimes seems irredeemably flat, static and ahistorical. What I think needs to be questioned is the idea that autonomy is best considered as the recovery or recuperation of the process of signification itself. I think this radically overstates our ability either collectively or individually to exercise control over the symbolic order and thus undermines the exceptionally valuable points he makes about respecting the integrity of different symbolic orders, indeed of difference/alterity *per se*. What he ends up constructing is a new, albeit self-consciously delimited, 'modest' metanarrative of humanity's striving after 'control' of its own process of signification when if there is a metanarrative to tell it is far better told in terms of

the recovery or recuperation of social, political and economic power. This is a narrative that as Castoriadis's evocation of now sanctified dates and movements indicates, privileges those forms of struggle that are explicitly 'revolutionary' and which call for forms of participation that reproduce the Athenian *polis* which as Castoriadis himself indicates is hardly a culturally 'neutral' reference point, but rather a now highly mythologised abstraction from historical reality. Of course in his 'postmodern' moments Castoriadis reminds us of the non-totalising manner in which he is deploying this motif or 'project' so that his response to those who accuse him of a teleological conception of autonomisation is to repeat the admonition either that the entire revolutionary project is a 'making'/'doing' which as such is contingent on the autonomous actions of those involved in it and thus whose end can be projected but not 'known';²¹ or that we are misinterpreting him when we think that what he is offering is any kind of model at all when really it is only a 'suggestion' or extension of those impulses he sees around him in everyday struggles.²² In my view such responses detract from the important political message contained in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* and the otherwise highly pertinent analysis of difference he gives within it. Castoriadis *is* after all right: 'autonomy' is a value to which any left radicalism has to be addressed and part of the importance of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* is that it gives us insight into what a 'post-modern' reading of autonomy might look like. This would be a view that insists with Castoriadis on the radical otherness of symbolic and cultural formation; that would resist the imposition on such cultures of models and blueprints of 'autonomy' in advance of self-prescribed, self-chosen alternatives to the social given; that would seek to develop ties and alliances between such alternatives in accordance with the values of self-determination and equality; that would seek to extend help and solidarity in a spirit of respect and recognition for the other, whilst acknowledging our common humanity. Such a 'postmodern' struggle for autonomy would probably not reproduce or conform to the heroic struggles which sustain the modernist Castoriadis, but it would be one that would be able inspiration from the analysis as well as the sentiments expressed in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*.

21 As on p. 87 of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* where he compares revolution to the writing of a book.

22 As in his response to Paul Thibaud on p. 231 in the interview 'The Revolutionary Exigency' in *Political and Social Writings* III where he compares the revolutionary process to the raising of a child, implying that we have to grant a degree of 'autonomy' to the process itself.

Between Creative Democracy and Democratic Creativity

Craig Browne

One of the most significant dimensions of the work of Cornelius Castoriadis is its attempt to interlink the notions of democracy and social creativity. Democracy, in his opinion, is the social-historical creation of the individual and collective project of autonomy. It exemplifies the radical creative power of the social imaginary to give rise to forms that transcend the conditions of their emergence, since democracy is an unprecedented and novel signification. Its instituting of autonomy and equality are related to the preceding historical conditions but they cannot be reduced to them. Indeed, democracy is an exceptional social-historical institution, because of its explicit and reflexive recognition of the social character of the instituting of society.

In his theoretical and political writings, Castoriadis elucidated various dimensions of democracy and challenged numerous misconceptions, but the project of autonomy's rupture with social imaginaries that attributed the institution of society to some extra-social source, such as the will of God or the laws of nature, constitutes the basic underpinning of democracy. It opened the way for the potentially unrestricted interrogation of the social order and practices that harness social creativity. "Democracy is a regime that explicitly, continually, institutes itself"¹ and "in such a way that the question of freedom, of justice, of equity, and of equality might always be posed anew within the framework of the 'normal' functioning of society"²

Castoriadis's conception of democracy's radical transformation of social instituting should overcome the demarcation between the two most important strands of thought that have sought to interlink democracy and social creativity: the radical democratic variant of North American pragmatist philosophy and the French theories of democratic creativity, which includes theorists like Claude Lefort, Marcel Gauchet, and Castoriadis. These two stands of thought

1 Castoriadis, C. (2007). Arnold, H. (Trans). *Figures of the Thinkable*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

2 Castoriadis, C. (1997b). Curtis, D.A. (Trans). *World in Fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

involve contrasting visions of how the social and the political are intertwined and these visions inform their respective conceptions of democratisation. Despite his critical disagreements with other theorists of democratic creativity and his theoretical proposition that social imaginaries institute a horizon of meaning that shapes and legitimates social action, my analysis details how Castoriadis tends to conceive of democratic transformations as ensuing more from the politicising of the social. Rather than as a process of socialising the political, as is the case for John Dewey and George Herbert Mead's pragmatist interpretations of democracy and democratisation. Of course, the reciprocal implication of the notions of the social and political means that this contrast is in large part one of attribution and emphasis, yet the contrast does signify a genuine dilemma and it probably reflects the residues of underlying differences in political cultures.³

In my opinion, the current ideological uncertainty of modern social and political movements for emancipation and justice, especially those of socialism and social democracy, makes these various endeavours to interlink democracy and social creativity especially important. Pragmatism and theories of democratic creativity can contribute to moving beyond this malaise, because they aim to disclose subjects' capacities to determine the conditions of social life and the self-limitation of human freedom. These two strands of thought share a commitment to the radical renewal of democracy and the critique of hierarchy and its legitimations. The notion of creativity is central to their respective normative conceptions of autonomy and their distinctive, though contrasting, claims that democracy derives from epistemological orientations and ontological interpretations of the world and experience. This means that they are particularly concerned with the broad 'infrastructural power' of cultural meanings and not just, in Dewey's⁴ terms, the institution of 'political democracy' or what Castoriadis⁵ defines as 'explicit power': those institutions with the authoritative power to establish social order and to protect against threats to the individual and collective.

There are more specific intersections between the work of Castoriadis and the radical democratic pragmatist perspectives on democracy. Notably, Castoriadis consistently recalls the importance of education and the Ancient

3 Eisenstadt, S.N. (1999). *Paradoxes of Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

4 Dewey, J. (1984b). 'The Public and its Problems'. In Boydston, J.A. (Ed.). *John Dewey The Later Works, 1925–1953, Volume 2: 1925–1927*, pp. 235–372. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

5 Castoriadis, C. (1991). Curtis, D.A. (Trans). *Politics, Philosophy, Autnomy*, p. 154. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greek sense of *paideia* to democracy. Dewey and Mead likewise considered that socialisation and education are critical to democracy and sought to clarify how these formative processes could facilitate the autonomy of individuals by drawing on their creativity. Similarly, Castoriadis and the pragmatists identify democracy with open discussion and public deliberation over matters of common concern. Indeed, it is mainly on this basis that Castoriadis argues that *politics* was a creation of Ancient Greek democracy.⁶ Since democracy rendered matters relevant to the collective open to public deliberation and compelled lucid participation, it radically differed from 'the political' structures which existed in societies prior to it.

These societies, in his opinion, involved political machinations, struggles over explicit power, succession conflicts, and the pursuit of particular interests, but not politics in the sense that Ancient Greece instituted. That is, the politics that is able to put the instituted order into question and the public space that makes the social imaginary of self-legislation a meaningful conviction.⁷ In addition, Castoriadis and Dewey overlap in their critical diagnoses of the contemporary tendencies that counteract democracy, considering that the privatising of individuals is generating an indifference to the fate of the collective. They argue that this indifference results from the subordinating of public participation to technical modes of control and bureaucratic administration. In their opinions, these tendencies are compatible with, what Castoriadis describes as, capitalist society's liberal oligarchic power structure, and, on Dewey's view, the market's reinforcement of private interests.⁸

Despite these intersecting concerns and a common emphasis on democracy's symbolic meanings, there are substantial differences between pragmatist philosophy and theories of democratic creativity. Pragmatism's interest in the achievement of agreement through symbolic communication developed from its proposed epistemology, but it has been recognised that the post-civil war context shaped its interest in agreement.⁹ Pragmatism responded to a need for the restoration of that sense of community and civil association that Alexis de Tocqueville¹⁰ had identified as critical to democracy in America. Tocqueville's idea of the 'democratic revolution', the irresistible unfolding

6 Castoriadis, C. (1991).

7 Castoriadis, C. (1991).

8 Dewey, J. (1984b).

9 Menand, L. (2001). *The Metaphysical Club*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

10 Tocqueville, de, A. (2003). In *Bevan, G.E. (Trans). America*. London: Penguin Books. Also in Tocqueville, de, A. (1955). Gilbert, S. (Trans). *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*. New York: Anchor Books.

of 'democracy as the cause and effect of an equality of conditions', has also been a major informant of theories of democratic creativity.¹¹ However, the theories of democratic creativity have been equally influenced by Tocqueville's analysis of the tendency within modern democracy which permits the gradual imposition of a kind of democratic despotism in the guise of a tutelary state and Tocqueville's thesis that the French Revolution's long-term consequence was the consolidation of the apparatuses of state power.¹² The emergence of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century and the conversion of theories of emancipation into ideologies legitimating domination are important parts of the historical background to theories of democratic creativity. In the writings of Castoriadis, Lefort and Gauchet,¹³ it leads to sustained re-examinations of the preconditions of democracy in modernity and a concern with the proper characterisation of conflict in democracy. Although the basic conflict of a democratic society is characterised in different ways and in a manner that is sometimes at variance with its usual understandings, there is a broadly shared view among theories of democratic creativity that the concealment and dissimulation of conflict lessens and undermines democracy.

The contrast drawn by way of reference to different dimensions of Tocqueville's analyses of democracy and revolution is simply illustrative of differences in general intent and historical supposition. It is not meant to convey the substantive details of the arguments of pragmatism and theories of democratic creativity, which are far more complex and multifaceted. For example, conflict is a fundamental aspect of John Dewey's pragmatist conception of ethics and Dewey's vision of democracy is grounded in an ethical orientation.¹⁴ Dewey believed that moral innovation derive from practically resolving the conflict between incompatible courses of action that appeared equally valid.¹⁵ What the contrast does, however, is point to a salient difference between these perspectives on the relative weighting of the relationship between the social and the political. It is in terms of the nexus of the social and the political that I want to suggest that the possibility for radical democratisation in the

11 Lefort, C. (1988). Macey, D. (Trans). *Democracy and Political Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Also in Gauchet, M. (1994). 'Tocqueville'. In Lilla, M. (Ed.). *New French Thought: Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

12 Tocqueville, de, A. (2003).

13 Gauchet, M. (1997). Burge, O. (Trans). *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

14 Dewey, J. (1969). 'The Ethics of Democracy'. In Boydston, J.A. (Ed.). *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882–1898, Volume 1*, pp. 227–249. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

15 Hoy T. (1998). *The Political Philosophy of John Dewey—Towards a Constructive Renewal*. Praeger: Westport.

contemporary historical conjuncture is between pragmatism's normative ideal of creative democracy and that of democratic creativity.

My analysis is more comparative than critical; the differences that are noted allude to potential deficiencies but my interest is in the respective reinterpretations of democracy. In the case of Castoriadis, the comparison with pragmatist accounts of democracy is important because their perspective brings into focus the two major senses in which he considers that the modern democratic imaginary has gone beyond that of the Ancients. The first is the extension of the categories of persons eligible to participate as citizens in modern democracies, although Castoriadis emphasises how equal liberty is still highly qualified in practice. The second aspect of the modern democratic imaginary bears on the relationship of the social and the political: "In the ancient world, institutive political activity was very highly limited, not to say nonexistent, beyond the strictly political domain . . . In principle, no institution in modern society can escape being put into question"¹⁶

I

The current interest in theories of the institution of the *political*, like those of Hannah Arendt,¹⁷ Carl Schmitt¹⁸ and Claude Lefort,¹⁹ can be related to a desire to uncover the politics that initially generates the political order.²⁰ In a sense, this desire involves a kind of phenomenological concern with understanding the phenomena of the political in its own terms and it marks something of a departure from the visions of the social determination of politics, irrespective of whether this vision of social determination focussed on class conflict, market exchange, bureaucratic administration or the overarching constraints of industrialisation.²¹ Further, this interest in the political incorporates some disquiet with sociological understandings of how the dynamics of social conflict can change institutional configurations and alter the conditions of

16 Castoriadis, C. (1997a). "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime". *Constellations*, 4 (1): 1: 18. p. 96.

17 Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

18 Schmitt, C. (2007). Konzen, M. and McCormick, J.P. (Trans). *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

19 Lefort, C. (1986). Thompson, John, B. (Ed.). *The Political Forms of Modern Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Also in Lefort, C. (1988).

20 Mouffe, 1993.

21 Lefort, C. (2000). Curtis, D.A. (Trans). *Writing the Political Text*. pp. 266–269) Durham: Duke University Press.

legitimation.²² From this standpoint, explicating the *political* entails an appreciation of the contingency of action and the novelty of historical events, particularly those involving significant choices and commitments. By contrast, modern social science allegedly accentuates the regularity, predictability and determination of social processes. It thereby neglects, on this analysis, the potential of the *political* for radical innovation and the specificity of political confrontations, which can generate outcomes that are irreducible to their preceding social conditions. Although this criticism of modern social science is somewhat general, it intimates at an appreciation of the political significance of imagination and the extent to which the imaginary is implicated in the very constitution of the political.

Naturally, this vision of the political as an imaginary creation is very different to that of the dominant understanding of politics. The latter is largely founded on the assumptions of liberal contract theory and its institutional realisation in advanced Western democracies. Politics is typically depicted as an institutional arena that is demarcated from the social—usually understood as relations in civil society and other forms of association—and a liberal polity is supposedly organised by the rational pursuit of individual and collective interests. This vision of politics permits, to be sure, some variations in institutional structures and its dominance has never gone uncontested. Nevertheless, the crystallizing of this understanding had the effect of limiting the imagining of the political in at least two significant respects. First, the notion that the social and the political can be institutionally separated and investigated as discrete segments of objective reality was entirely compatible with the disciplinary division between sociology and political science. Second, the dominant conception of politics has strong connections with modernisation theory, which implied that radical alternatives, like communism, anarchism and fascism, were only temporary and unstable deviations. In fact, even the opponents of this vision tended to assume, though usually on the basis of somewhat different criteria, that modernization was or would be a uniform process structured by rationalization. In either case, modernity was not understood as a field of tension shaped by the conflicting articulations of social imaginaries.²³

The participation of modern social sciences in the broad social imaginary and the limits that this imposes on conceptions of democratisation justifies

²² Wagner, P. (2008). *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

²³ Arnason, J.P. (1991). 'Modernity as Project and as Field of Tensions'. In Honneth, A.H. Joas, H. (Eds.). *Communicative Action*. pp. 181–213. Cambridge: Polity Press. Also in Arnason, J.P. (1989). 'The Imaginary Constitution of Modernity', *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales*, 86: 323–237.

the interest of theories of democratic creativity and pragmatism in the construction of meaning. It also exemplifies the difficulties of explicating meaning and reflexivity's significance. The creation of meaning can be both a process of imaginative projection beyond the present social order and the most effective means of its political consolidation. In fact, as the preceding discussion of Castoriadis should have made clear, theories of democratic creativity and pragmatism contend that it is only under certain conditions that this creativity is linked to projects of autonomy and democracy. Indeed, they consider that the possibility of a genuine interrogation of the categories of the social and the political is a democratic creation. For genuine interrogation and deliberation are activities that (what is normally taken as) politics has regularly suppressed—a suppression that emerges from, and with, the same delimitation of the meaning of politics. The political, Lefort argues, generates a horizon of meaning and it seeks to circumscribe the terrain of politics in a way that generally veils its genesis in society. "The political is thus revealed, not in what we call political activity, but in the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured. It appears in the sense that the process whereby society is ordered and unified across its divisions becomes visible. It is obscured in the sense that the locus of politics (the locus in which parties compete and in which a general agency of power takes shape and is reproduced) becomes defined as particular, while the principle which generates the overall configuration is concealed."²⁴

Lefort's conception of 'the political' concerns the relationship of society to its instituting. It is therefore similar in many respects to Castoriadis' notion of the imaginary institution of society, rather than Castoriadis' more delimited sense of the political as concerning explicit power. In Castoriadis' opinion, the notion of the imaginary institution of society is preferable because it avoids the potentially misleading overextension of the category of the political and the normative problems that may ensue from it, such as subordinating all spheres of human activity to political determination.²⁵ At the same time, Lefort's conception of the political was precisely intended to enable an account for the emergence of totalitarian political forms and particularly their transfiguration of the democratic imaginary. These two theorists of democratic creativity broadly agree that political forms of mobilisation are necessary to democratically transform social heteronomy and alienation, but they somewhat differ in their interpretation of collective reflexivity and what might be termed the democratic form's configuration. Castoriadis emphasises direct democracy

24 Lefort, C. (1988), p. 11.

25 Castoriadis, C. (1991).

and how participation is an indispensable presupposition of an autonomous society, whereas Lefort highlights the disassociation in modernity of those dimensions of sovereignty that were fused together in the symbolic order of the Ancien Regime, such as knowledge, law and religion.

The permutations of the relationship of the categories of the social and the political have led to modification in the meaning of the notion of democracy. In Ancient Greece, the word *democracy* meant the rule of the *demos* or the power of the people. Democracy could be readily contrasted with other forms of power, such as that of the aristocracy, meaning the rule of the elite or the best, or that of oligarchy.²⁶ Of course, the word democracy would have meant very little if it did not signify a range of associated preconditions, normative rules and modes of collective organization. It is these aspects of democracy that are regularly highlighted in the contrast between the participatory democracy of the Ancient Greek assembly and the modern institution of liberal representative democracy. In each case, democracy is taken to refer to a mode of rule, even though the modern principle of delegation can be viewed as not only transferring the power of the people but also limiting it to the extent that it is no longer the determining authority. Similarly, the modern liberal sense of freedom differs in the extent of its emphasis on the restriction of state interference in the beliefs and activities of the individual, yet this too led to a more limited institution of the political equality of citizens. That is, compared to Ancient Greek democracy's substantive political equality of citizens, modern equality is primarily formal or legal. There are tensions then not only between ancient and modern democracy, but also particularly within the modern understanding of democracy. The modern image of the social exacerbated these tensions, as much as it was an image that was generated by them.

The growing importance of the social in modernity led to a recognition of the problem of reconciling the meaning of democracy as a form of political authority with that understanding of democracy as a principle of justice. From the latter perspective, it is regularly argued that democracy, as a system of rule, can only be legitimate and consistent with its principles if it meets the demands of justice. In fact, the endeavours to bind these two meanings of democracy together have expanded, particularly as a consequence of the recent decline of alternative political frameworks that were ideologically committed to equality and justice. Although the contemporary political constellation may have illuminated the need to confront these tensions, philosophical pragmatism had already endeavoured to constructively interconnect these different meanings of democracy. There are various dimensions of pragmatism's

26 Castoriadis, C. (2007), p. 118.

outlook, including some that could otherwise seem quite tangential, that are relevant to tying together democracy's meanings as form of political authority and a principle of justice. They include pragmatism's evaluation of knowledge in terms of consequences, the non-foundational epistemological demand that problem-solutions derive from practices rather than suppositions external to them, the focus on the communicative conditions of agreement, and the ensuing requirement of the equality and autonomy of members of a community aiming at shared agreement²⁷ In my opinion, however, the most important feature is pragmatism's distinctive understanding of democracy as instituted and emergent meaning, which emphasises democracy's creative dynamic and the significance of collective reflexivity to democracy.

Creative democracy is the incipient normative ideal of pragmatism.²⁸ It concerns the creative process of extending and deepening democracy through democratic practices. Now, pragmatism developed a distinctive understanding of social creativity and it claimed that democracy enabled the fullest realisation of creativity. Pragmatists argued that innovative learning develops in response to the disruption of practices and the problematising of corresponding forms of knowledge that were held previously to be true. In effect, disruption precipitates forms of social creativity, especially through provoking the anticipating of alternative problem solutions and their communicative evaluation. Imagination is central to the innovative positing of alternatives and the collective reflexivity that is achieved through symbolic communication about them. For pragmatists, the analysis of the scientific research community demonstrated that these practices should be highly democratic and cooperative, since there was a greater possibility of arriving at the truth through the organization of practices according to these values. In these terms, creative democracy would be a continuous process of discerning the limited institutionalisation of democracy compared to its ideals and the corresponding reconstruction of social relations.

27 Dewey, J. (1984a). 'The Development of American Pragmatism'. In Boydston, J.A. (Ed.). *John Dewey The Later Works, Volume 2: 1925–1927*, pp. 1–21. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press. Also in Morris, C. (1970). *The Pragmatic Movement in American Philosophy*. New York: George Braziller. Also see Menand, L. (2001). Also see Joas, H. (1993). Gaines, J. (Trans). *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

28 Dewey, J. (1988). 'Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us'. In *John Dewey The Later Works 1925–1953, Volume 14*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. Also in Bernstein, R. (2000). 'Creative Democracy—The Task Still Before Us', *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 21 (3) 2000: 215–228. Also in Joas, H. (1996). Gaines, J. and Keast, P. (Trans). *The Creativity of Action*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

For instance, this sense of democratisation can be seen in the historical extension of the categories of persons eligible for citizenship and the expansion of the effective claims that are associated with citizenship. Yet, Dewey believed that democracy does not have a fixed institutional form, rather it represents a set of normative principles and social ideals that are relevant to all contexts of social interaction²⁹ Dewey considered that every institution of democracy is an approximation to its proper meaning as a social and moral ideal. For this reason, institutionalisations should be assessed in terms of their potential for extending democracy.

The term *creative democracy* was itself originally the title of a late essay by Dewey,³⁰ which restated many of the distinctive features of his conception of democracy. In this essay, Dewey argued that the crisis of the nineteen-thirties called for a political inventiveness equivalent to that which gave rise to the democratic institution of the United States of America. Nevertheless, Dewey consistently contrasted the institution of *political* democracy with democracy as a social-moral ideal and a mode of associated living. Dewey's position implied a thorough socialising of democracy and he emphasised the importance to democracy of pre-political communal experiences of social cooperation.³¹ Dewey³² suggested that as 'an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself.' In Dewey's opinion, the key problem confronting the USA in the twentieth century was precisely that the Great Society created by modern industrialisation had yet to become the Great Community.³³ For Dewey, democracy is founded in individuals' experience and habits, because democracy represents an ethic that is applied to conduct. For this reason, he argued that the interpretation of democracy as the protection of the private freedoms constitutes a curtailment of the original liberal vision of freedom. The method of democracy, Dewey believed, was to settle conflicts of interest through public discourses that

29 Dewey, J. (1988). Also in Morris, D. and Shapiro J. (Eds. Introduction). (1993). In Morris, D. and Shapiro J. (Eds.). *J. Dewey, The Political Writings*. pp. ix–xix. Indianapolis Indiana: Hackett Publishing. Also in Talisse, R. (2005). *Democracy after Liberalism*. New York: Routledge.

30 Dewey, J. (1988).

31 Honneth, A. (1998). "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today", *Political Theory* 26 (6): 763–783.

32 Dewey, J. (1984). p. 324.

33 Dewey, J. (1984). Also see Westbrook, R. (1991). *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

explicitly evaluate claims in terms of a more inclusive interest.³⁴ Democracy is, in this sense, a form of 'organized intelligence', involving the application of knowledge to the public good and a 'faith' in the capacity of experience to generate new understandings, as well as for experience to be enriched by the widening of participation and interaction.

There have been several recent attempts to develop aspects of Dewey's pragmatist conception of the social form of the normative ideal of democracy. Notably, deliberative democrats have elaborated upon the procedures of discursive agreement, civic republicans have emphasised forms of social association, and Honneth's recent critical theory has explicated the necessary experience of cooperation in the division of labour.³⁵ Despite the disagreements between these positions, they share Dewey's pragmatist view that democracy is founded in the vertical social relations of subjects to one another and the communicative processes of developing shared understandings about matters of common concern. However, models of deliberative democracy, associative democracy and democracy as reflexive cooperation tend to presuppose pragmatism's notion of democracy as instituted and emergent meaning, especially with respect to the transformations that they consider are required for their criteria to be realised.³⁶ In this regard, imagination is less central to these recent reconstructions of Dewey's vision of democracy.

By contrast, Dewey believed that democracy emanated from a particular orientation towards experience, one that accepts that freedom entails a certain indeterminacy of action and involves some projection beyond its antecedent conditions.

The centrality of creative action to pragmatism's normative ideal of democracy is evident from George Herbert Mead's theory of the symbolic form of social institutions and the importance of individuals' imaginings to their

34 Dewey, J. (1986). 'Liberalism and Social Action' In Boydston, J.A. (Ed.). *John Dewey The Later Works, 1925–1953, Volume 11: 1935–1937*, pp. 1–65. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

35 Talisse, R. (2003). "Can Democracy be a Way of Life? Deweyan Democracy and the Problem of Pluralism", *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* XXXIX, (1): 1–21. Also in Talisse, R. (2005). Also see Honneth, A. (1998). Also see Dryzek, J. (1990). *Discursive Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Also see Dryzek J. (2000). *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Also see Bohman, J. and Rehg W. (Eds.). (1997). *Deliberative Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. Also see Honneth, A. (1998). "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today", *Political Theory* 26 (6): 763–783.

36 Browne, C. (2009). 'Pragmatism and Radical Democracy', *Critical Horizons*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (April): 54–75.

participation in society.³⁷ Mead's notion of the universalistic perspective involved in taking the standpoint of the *generalised other* similarly highlights democracy's genesis in experiences of social communication and cooperation. Mead argued that the *generalised other* was the image of society that the self develops and it represents a more abstract structure of consciousness to that which initially emerges from an individual's interaction with the immediately present *concrete other*.

Mead's theory is often regarded as attempting to provide a social basis in interaction for the moral outlook of Kant's categorical imperative (that is, that a person should act only according to a rule that she or he would at the same time will as a universal law) but Mead's theory can also be considered an attempted communication theoretical reconstruction of Rousseau's democratic ideal of the general will.³⁸ Mead's conception of the symbolically mediated character of intersubjective relations of mutual recognition makes his reconstruction resistant to the potentially heteronomous form of collective fusion that has sometimes been attributed to Rousseau's idea of the general will. In short, Mead's communicative conception of the mutual recognition of common meanings and those normative principles that underpin social association are suggestive of how democratic justice can be realised through intersubjective freedoms.³⁹

Mead argued that individual autonomy is based in a capacity for creative responses to the meanings conveyed in interaction, as well as a reflexive appreciation of the moral implication of the cooperative organization of society. For this reason, intersubjective freedoms are inherently social and democratic, because they are always reciprocally granted. This conception's parallels with that of Dewey can be seen in the two traits that the latter singled out as characterising a democratically constituted society:

"The first signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control. The second means not only freer interaction

37 Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Joas, H. (1985). Meyer, R. (Trans). *G.H. Mead—a contemporary re-examination of his thought*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

38 Mead, George Herbert (1964). 'Natural Rights and the Theory of the Political Institution'. In Reck, A. (Ed.) *George Herbert Mead: Selected Writings*. pp. 150–170. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. Also in Joas, H. (1998). 'The Autonomy of the Self—The Median Heritage and its Postmodern Challenge', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 1 (1): 7–18.

39 Browne, C. (2010). 'Democratic Justice as Intersubjective Freedoms', *Thesis Eleven* 101: 53–62.

between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation) but change in social habit—its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse.”⁴⁰

The contemporary French theories of democratic creativity have a different sense of how the social is imagined and given symbolic representation. It is one of the major reasons why Castoriadis⁴¹ and Lefort⁴² regard democracy as a political regime. A democratic regime, Castoriadis⁴³ argues, involves a ‘substantive conception of the ends of the political institution and from a view, and from an aim, of the type of human being that corresponds to it.’ As previously noted, Lefort’s notion of the political concerns the overall constitution of society and the symbolic delimitation of politics. In this sense, the political is broader than the state and centres on the creation of a symbolic order and its crystallising of mores and beliefs that are guided by a set of implicit norms about good and evil, just and unjust, desirable and undesirable, legitimate and illegitimate.⁴⁴

According to Lefort, a political regime is a particular way of combining a structure of authority and a mode of life. In these respects, there are important overlaps between the notion of a political regime and pragmatist notions of creative democracy, specifically in terms of the importance attributed to public imaginings of the collective good and the significance of socialisation and education to democracy. Even so, Lefort’s conception of ideology and his characterisation of democracy as the internal regularising of a principle of opposition are indicative of the demarcation between these perspectives. It could be argued that the recent pragmatist inspired accounts of deliberative procedures, civic associations and reflexive cooperation simultaneously recognise the social division of the principle of opposition and seek to subordinate it, particularly with respect to its distinctively political constitution.

Lefort⁴⁵ considers that ideology poses a problem that has to be addressed at the level of the political, because ideology is effectively the demand that society coincide with the representation of the social. In other words, ideology is the imaginary relation that a society constructs to its institutional reality, a reality that is symbolic as well as material. While ideology emerges from

40 Dewey, J. (1980). Boydston, J.A. (Ed.). ‘Democracy and Education’ in *John Dewey The Middle Works 1899–1924 Volume 9:1916. p. 92*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

41 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 1.

42 Lefort, C. (1988).

43 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 1.

44 Lefort, C. (1988), p. 3.

45 Lefort, C. (1986).

within the social order, ideology dissimulates and conceals the conflicts that ensue from the internal divisions of the social. In this sense, Lefort argues, 'the discourse on the social can maintain its position of being external to its object only by presenting itself as the guarantor of the rule which attests, by its very existence, to the embodiment of the idea in the social relation.'⁴⁶ Bourgeois ideology, which according to Lefort appears in the guise of the grand ideas of reason, progress, capital, freedom and similar, exemplifies the dual character of ideology as representation and as norm. Bourgeois ideology seems external to society because it is 'organized in terms of a split between *ideas* and the supposed *real*, but this distinction obscures its implication in the constitution of the way that things are.'⁴⁷ In bourgeois society, these ideas establish the rules of the interpretation of symbolic representation and prescribe the conditions of translating knowledge into action.

Democracy is, in part, a matter of how a social order generates a political form that is open to its internal division and that resists the symbolic closure that is typical of modern ideology and pre-modern religions. The difference between these two forms of symbolic closure is that modern ideologies seek to incarnate rationality and appear to be immanent in the social order, whereas religions represent the social order as derived from some extra-social source, such as the will of God or revelation. In the latter case, this enables the imaginary construction of social symbols that appear to originate from a domain external to the social, yet they are the means of gaining access to the world and making sense of reality.⁴⁸ In Lefort's opinion, this imaginary was the sacred basis of political sovereignty. He draws on Ernst Kantorowicz's⁴⁹ argument that the king was the embodiment of two orders of reality: the transcendent (or divine) and the immanent, that is, the king 'gave society a social body'. Significantly, what is distinctive about democracy is that it breaks with this theological-political matrix. In a democracy, the "locus of power becomes *an empty place*."⁵⁰ Democracy is then animated by the apparent contradiction of being the power of the people and the 'power of nobody', because power cannot be identical or 'consubstantial' with a particular individual or group, that is, power cannot be appropriated by a particular individual, group or party in a

46 Lefort, C. (1986). p. 206. Also in Singer, B. (2006). "Thinking the 'Social' with Claude Lefort", *Thesis Eleven* 87: 83–95.

47 Lefort, C. (1986), p. 205.

48 Lefort, C. (1988), pp. 220–224.

49 Kantorowicz, E. (1957). *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

50 Lefort, C. (1988), p. 17.

democracy.⁵¹ Lefort contends that institutional procedures and arrangements have developed to prevent this appropriation of power, particularly periodic redistributions, but he considers that these emanate from a radical transformation of the symbolic order. The locus of power, as an empty place, 'cannot be represented. Only the mechanisms of the exercise of power are visible, or only the men, the mere mortals, who hold political authority.'⁵²

For Lefort, the internal regularising of the principle of opposition is generated through the political form of society and it is with reference to this democratic form that the particular dimensions of politics are articulated. This is a major reason why democracy is for him a regime, rather than the aggregation of the types of interaction that it contains. "We would be wrong", he writes, "to conclude that power now resides in society on the grounds that it emanates from popular suffrage; it remains the agency by virtue of which society apprehends itself in its unity and relates to itself in time and space."⁵³ It is through this imaginary, Lefort argues, that democracy constitutes a radical alteration in the structure of interaction. This is demonstrated by two developments in particular: first, individuals become independent of the hierarchical structures of rank and fixed position. Second, democratic forms of society initiate a process of the disentangling of power, law and knowledge.⁵⁴ In Lefort's opinion, the historical experience of totalitarian societies clarified the significance of this disassociation to democracy; totalitarian political regimes seek to fuse power, law and knowledge under the modern condition of the denial of an extra-social source of the social order. Yet, totalitarian regimes are somewhat counter-modern in seeking to end contingency through the integration of knowledge, power and law, and to thereby be a society without history. The basic experience of democracy is then of a radically different temporal and spatial order. Lefort claims that: 'democracy is instituted and sustained by the dissolution of the markers of certainty. It inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law and knowledge.'⁵⁵

Although Castoriadis⁵⁶ disagrees with Lefort's terminology and aspects of Lefort's evaluation of liberal democracy, Castoriadis similarly considers that the majority of societies have concealed their social genesis by instituting a closure of meaning, either through religious and mythical imaginaries

⁵¹ Lefort, C. (1986), p. 279.

⁵² Lefort, C. (1988), p. 17.

⁵³ Lefort, C. (1988), p. 17.

⁵⁴ Lefort, C. (1988).

⁵⁵ Lefort, C. (1988), p. 19.

⁵⁶ Castoriadis, C. (1991), p. 158.

depiction of an extra-social source of the institution of society or the meta-explanations of modern social orders, such as those of rationality and development. In his opinion, this occlusion is typical of the alienated structure of the dominance of instituted society over that of instituting society, that is, the seeming independence of the existing social order in relation to that of its social-historical collective creation. For Castoriadis, this is the paramount conflict of every society. The instituted social imaginary's veiling of creativity coincides with the structuring of social relations in a heteronomous manner. Now, to the extent that they have sought to make explicit the processes of their instituting, democratic societies represent a major historical rupture. The social imaginary, Castoriadis⁵⁷ argues, generates an encompassing horizon of meaning and is "primordially, the creation of significations and the creation of images and figures that support these significations". The dominant capitalist imaginary in modernity of the unlimited rational—but properly pseudo-rational in Castoriadis' opinion—domination and control of the world draws together an indefinite range of associated figures and significations, which then make sense through this connection and can be mobilised in different ways. It is in this sense that he claims that Marxism's commitment to the primacy of material production reflected its continuities with the capitalist imaginary and that this connection manifested itself in the political forms of authority that Marxism generated.⁵⁸

According to Castoriadis, the capitalist imaginary has prevailed over the democratic imaginary of the project of autonomy, but the capitalist institution has been restrained by the project of autonomy and the contestation it has generated, particularly by the workers' and women's movements. These movements have been instrumental in the modern questioning of inherited institutions beyond the domain of the political. Social imaginaries are, neither real, in the sense of derived from material states of affairs, nor rational, in the sense of being a product of the logical ordering and logical combining of elements and concepts. Rather, the imaginary shapes the perception of reality and underpins the making of connections and associations that are the prerequisite for logical reasoning, even at the level of the equating of sign and referent.⁵⁹ The basic conflict of any social order is therefore more deep-seated than that of ideological distortion and it even afflicts the critique of ideology. That is, for any social order to exist and persist there has to be an institution

57 Castoriadis, C. (1987), p. 238, Castoriadis, C. (1988). Blamey, K. (Trans). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

58 Castoriadis, C. (1987; 1991; 1997b).

59 Castoriadis, C. (1987).

of fixed and stable meanings and significations, yet as instituted the imaginary denies the arbitrary nature of this creation of a world of meaning and its associated significations.

Of course, there are tensions within this world created by the imaginary and Castoriadis⁶⁰ wants to argue that social imaginaries have the potential to overturn the instituted order and that human freedom depends on the power of imagination. The imagination's free, rather than determined, positing of forms and figures enables individuals to achieve some independence with respect to the instituted conditions and imagination facilitates a break with behavioural repetition, which otherwise has strong institutional, as well as psychic, underpinnings. Nonetheless, Castoriadis considers that the signification of autonomy is contingent on instituted society and it cannot be presumed outside of the social imaginary. The democratic project of individual and collective autonomy originated in Ancient Greece and underwent a renaissance in the thirteenth century with the emergence of republican city-states in Western Europe. In each instance, there was a radical transformation in the social imaginary, because, as was noted at the outset, democracy presupposes the idea that the institution of society originates from the people themselves and accordingly instantiates the possibility of an unlimited interrogation of the social and political order.

"The creation of politics takes place when the established institution of society is put into question as such and in its various aspects and dimensions (which rapidly leads to the discovery and the explicit elaboration, but also a *new and different articulation*, of solidarity), that is to say, when *another relation*, previously unknown, is created between the instituting and the instituted".⁶¹

Democracy is the collective creation of the broadly shared social imaginary of autonomy and equality. Yet, democracy's signification of self-legislation and self-governance mean that the people have to define the limits of their action without reference to some external source or criteria. Despite its greater restrictions on citizenship, Castoriadis believes that the Ancient Athenians better understood than modern democrats the preconditions and implications of the people being subject to the laws that they have themselves created. Specifically, Ancient Greek culture appreciated that democracy is not just externally threatened, but internally threatened by its own actions and *hubris*, which derives from 'the essential vagueness of the ultimate bearings of our action' and which 'exists where self-limitation is the only "norm", where

60 Castoriadis, C. (1991).

61 Castoriadis, C. (1991), p. 160.

“limits” are transgressed which were nowhere defined.⁶² In Castoriadis’ opinion, the Ancient Greek polis remains a ‘germ’ or inspiration for the project of autonomy. It discloses the many respects in which formally democratic modern societies are not fully democratic, from the lesser sense of responsibility and obligation that ensue from the modern principles of delegation and representation through to the institutionalised mechanisms that preserve elites and subject citizens to specialised legal authority.⁶³

Similarly, Castoriadis⁶⁴ argues that recent theories have mistakenly equated democracy with procedures and mechanisms. These are important but their effectiveness is conditional on the background social imaginary and the practices that institute them. What is critical is the collective’s democratic orientation and substantive commitments. The features of the Ancient Greek imaginary that Castoriadis highlights are indicative of why he considers that democratisation involves the politicisation of the social. He places particular importance on the orientation to the world and experience that are conveyed by tragedy and the Greek denials of hope in a future afterlife and theodicies of injustice having a meaning or purpose.⁶⁵ There will always be some dimension of political agonism in altering the relationship of instituting to instituted society, as it involves putting one’s own self in question and opposing aspects of the institution that has made possible its interrogation. Interestingly, this position reveals itself in Castoriadis’ critical commentaries on those theoretical conceptions that recognised that democratisation entailed a realigning of the social and the political, like Rousseau and Tocqueville. Despite having presented a reformulation of Rousseau’s idea of the association required for the sovereign general will and endorsing his critique of representation,⁶⁶ objects to Rousseau’s misconception of the relation of instituting and instituted; a misconception that allegedly results from treating all delegation as undemocratic and envisioning political sovereignty as undertaking all social tasks.

In a similar manner, Castoriadis acknowledges that Tocqueville’s idea of the democratic revolution, based on the equality of condition, is a profound contribution to the socio-cultural understanding of democracy, but that it is inadequate with respect to the political problem of the democratic institution. Tocqueville’s ‘democratic revolution’ anticipates the social extension of democracy but industrialisation and the political order that develops in its

62 Castoriadis, C. (1991), p. 115. Also, Castoriadis, C. (1997b).

63 Castoriadis, C. (1997b).

64 Castoriadis, C. (1997a).

65 Castoriadis, C. (1991).

66 Castoriadis, C. (1991), p. 173. Also, Castoriadis, C. (2007), pp. 118–122.

wake render it a social-historical artefact. To my mind, neither of these criticisms of Rousseau and Tocqueville is entirely compelling in their detail. There seems to be more at issue than demonstrating that their visions are empirically unrealistic; the real intent of these criticisms appears to be that of demonstrating that politics is present in the disclosing of the difference between how things are and how they could be, including for and by democracy.

This contention will be contextualised and clarified in the following section, but Castoriadis'⁶⁷ democratic creative disposition to envisaging democratisation as politicising the social is equally evident in his endorsing the Ancient Greek's three-fold institutional division between the household and private sphere of the *oikos*, the public sphere of the interaction and exchange between private individuals of the *agora*, and the properly public-public domain of politics of the *ekklêsia*. The differences between these spheres properly emerges with democracy, however, Castoriadis'⁶⁸ definition of politics as the "reflective and lucid collective activity that aims at the overall institution of society. It pertains to everything in society that is participable and shareable" has important implications for the meaning of the relationship between these spheres. The 'truly public' quality of the *ekklêsia*, in Castoriadis' estimation, suggests that it is more fully oriented to democracy than the other spheres, since it should serve to uphold the interest of the collective in a way that interaction in the *oikos* and *agora* need not.⁶⁹ In fact, Castoriadis argues that a major failing of modern democracy is how private interests from the *agora* have infiltrated and undermined the public *ekklêsia* in liberal democratic or, more accurately in his opinion, liberal oligarchic regimes.

II

The aspects of the perspectives of the theories of creative democracy and democratic creativity that have been highlighted, such as Mead's idea of the generalised other, Dewey's notion of organised intelligence, Lefort's conception of the political, and Castoriadis's explication of the instituted imaginary, seek to develop a new appreciation of collective reflexivity and political agency. For these standpoints, the political is bound up with the process of signification and democracy is depicted as contingent on a community's representation and understanding of itself. This symbolically generated self-understanding

67 Castoriadis, C. (1997a).

68 Castoriadis, C. (1991), p. 169.

69 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 15; Castoriadis, C. (1997b), p. 87.

gives orientation to its social institutions and shapes the extent to which they endeavour to enact democracy, for instance, delineating the range of social inclusion, what is recognised as shared in common, and the space for public deliberation. In certain respects, these emphases on the symbolic construction of the political constitute a challenge to the equation of collective reflexivity with the institution of the state and highlight instead democratic forms of reflexivity's connection to the genesis of meaning in contexts of social interaction. In this final section, these linkages between imagination and the normative criteria of democracy will be related to these theoretical perspectives accounts of the democratic constitution of the social and the political.

The contrast between the American Revolution and the French Revolution can serve to further clarify the different ways in which these two radical democratic perspectives construct the relationship of the social and the political. The French Revolution posed the question of how to democratically institute the relationship between the social and political in a substantially different manner to that of the American Revolution, because it confronted the structure of the *Ancien Regime* and demanded the collective abolition of its hierarchically constituted social order. In this respect, the idea of the popular sovereignty of the *general will* highlighted the importance of collective mobilisation to the achievement of this objective and the resistance that democracy may encounter from the continuing attachment to aspects of the *Ancien Regime*'s imaginary, such as its theological endowment of the world with meaning and its sense that divisions between individuals reflected different orders of value. By contrast, the conditions of social association in the United States (as theorists of democratic creativity and philosophical pragmatists have emphasised) facilitated democracy, based on the equality of the conditions of independent proprietors and the different relationship that the colonies constructed to central authority.

These contrasting historical backgrounds give a certain insight into why the French theories of democratic creativity conceive of creativity as realised in the overall deployment of the institution of society and its configuration of social divisions. On this view, democratic forms seek to transform the social through political action, because politicisation facilitates equality and autonomy in relations of social association. By contrast, pragmatism locates creativity in the reciprocal experiences of social association and to this extent they conceive democratic forms as socialising the political, hence Dewey's concern with expanding democracy to all contexts of social interaction and his interpretation of democracy as a moral category.

Despite the differences between the American and French revolutions, they each disclosed certain characteristics of social creativity. The revolutions may

have been limited by the preceding social conditions, but they generated outcomes that could not have been entirely anticipated on the basis of them. For this reason, social creativity has a significant parallel with the self-legislating character of autonomy; it is founded on itself and cannot be derived from some sequence of cause and effect. Revolutions may be exceptional, but social creativity generally involves some acceptance of indeterminacy. Both theorists of creative democracy and democratic creativity argue that undemocratic political forms seek to deny indeterminacy through a closure of meaning and authoritarian forms of control. Lefort and Castoriadis contend that religious belief systems have acknowledged certain indeterminate features of the human condition, such as the contingency of the future, but in a manner that justifies some extra-social realm of transcendence. The displacement of sacred authority is then, for them, a precondition of autonomy. Similarly, they argue that the modern imaginary of rationality has legitimised new forms of hierarchical authority, particularly through expertise supplanting public participation and the dominance of bureaucratic organization.

These two theories of democratic creativity originated from the critique of the democratic centralism of communist parties and this led them to the view that structures of authority legitimise themselves through the imaginary representation of the social order.⁷⁰ The pragmatist ideal of creative democracy is similarly opposed to authoritarian and hierarchical forms of organization. In part, this opposition can be traced to pragmatism's epistemological commitment to the priority of the participatory standpoint of action and the notion of the equality of contributions to scientific inquiry. These influenced an image of a democratic community as one that creatively reconciles differences of opinion. Dewey believed that public discourses giving expression to social disagreements could expand understandings of the common good. Of course, this presupposes a democratic orientation has been effectively acquired through social experience, especially that of cooperation, and the imagination to, in Mead's terms, adopt the standpoint of the other. On these bases, pragmatists traced democracy to the formation of ethical orientations and defined it as a social ideal. In Dewey's opinion, the fact that individuals and political institutions may discord from this ideal is not so much an argument against it. Instead, recognising this discrepancy is the precipitating condition for the imaginative reconstruction of democracy, specifically through the simultaneous transformation of individuals and institutions.

It has been argued that in large part sociological understandings of the political were originally a product of its differentiation as a discipline and

70 Castoriadis, C. (1987); Lefort, C. (1986).

the corresponding awareness of the increasing independence of the social in modernity, irrespective of whether the social is defined in terms of structures of interaction, cultural identity or economic exchange. Despite the important insights of these interpretations of the social determination of the political, a consciousness of this perspective's limitations has grown in recent times. It is probable that this consciousness somewhat intersects with broader views of the historical limitations of those modern political ideologies committed to justice and emancipation. Democracy is regularly presented as the condition for addressing the latter predicament and renewing progressive politics, but this assumption only makes sense if there is a proper appreciation of the conditions of democratic invention, since the alternative is either further disillusionment with democracy or simply the consolidation of the dominant liberal form of the protection of private autonomy. In certain respects, this predicament was recognised by theories of democratic creativity and creative democracy, which accordingly seek to redefine the institutionalisation of the social and the political. For these theories, the political is primarily a matter of the creation of symbolic meanings and imagination is integral to the overall classification of reality. Social imaginaries represent and signify the purposes of social institutions, providing both legitimations and motivations.

The theories of democratic creativity and creative democracy specify various normative, epistemological and ontological dimensions of democratic practices, especially an opposition to hierarchy and an open orientation towards indeterminacy. In particular, they develop different conceptions of collective reflexivity, since they contend that democracy is reliant on the capacity of a society to act upon itself and the power to expand democracy through recognising its deficient institution. Although they agree that this feature of democracy involves the public imagination, there are differences concerning the sources and conditions of democratisation. Pragmatist theories of creative democracy tend to emphasise the genesis of democracy in social interaction and the socialisation of democracy through the transformation of moral orientations, whereas the theories of democratic creativity tend to highlight the creation of the democratic political form and the alterations that this framing makes to the social order, particularly through making explicit the process of its constitution and internal division. Finally, these perspectives contend that even though it is possible to enumerate preconditions, democracy is not so much a state as a creation, its existence is contingent on itself and its limits are those that it imposes on itself.

Imagining Democracy

Jeff Klooger

One of the defining features of the social-historical is its dual existence as reality and idea. Religion, law, family, science, education: all exist as real institutions with real histories. At the same time these terms refer to ideas about what such institutions mean, what their true or essential purposes are, and thus what they ought to be. These two—the reality and the idea—are often difficult to separate; and they cannot be separated completely, since the reality comes about in part as an embodiment of ideas, while at the same time the ideas are formed out of a real lived experience which involves and is influenced by real institutions (which does not mean that it merely reflects them).

Insofar as these ideas are conscious, they represent the tips of icebergs whose influence is far more pervasive than any explicit reflection on social institutions. The icebergs in question are the social imaginary significations that always underlie and organise social reality. As Castoriadis argues, social-historical reality comes into existence as an embodiment of social imaginary significations.¹ Only some of these significations attain the status of explicit ideas. When imaginary significations, explicit or implicit, inspire and motivate attempts to actively create and remake institutions, they give birth to social-historical *projects*. A social-historical project, then, is a complex thing made up of both the social imaginary significations that animate it—which are themselves subject to a plurality of interpretations and instantiations—and the social institutions that result from efforts to realize the project, the two being tied together by the activity of individuals and groups. The complexity is increased when one considers that any social-historical institution may be the result of the conjunctive and/or conflicting action of a number of different social imaginary significations and projects.

Democracy is one such project. It is driven and organised by social imaginary significations. It is also a social-historical reality consisting of concrete social institutions with real histories. These two components are intertwined in the complex manner just described. In order to understand democracy as a social-historical phenomenon, both sides—the significations and the

1 Castoriadis, C. (1987). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Blamey, K. (Trans). Oxford: Polity, and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

institutional reality—need to be taken into account and given their proper weight. Moreover, each component is fully specifiable only in view of the other.

There are a plethora of accounts of democracy, both as an idea and as a reality. But comprehensive histories of democracy are rare. John Keane's *The Life and Death of Democracy* advertises itself as the first such history in over a century.² It is admirably wide-ranging, if not exhaustive—more than the 958 pages of its single volume would probably be required for a truly exhaustive treatment of such an enormous subject. Keane's book explores the conceptualization of democracy as well as the institutions that have developed within societies that have been described as democracies. As Keane recognizes, understandings of democracy condition attitudes to it, and those attitudes in turn affect the prospects for the establishment and acceptance of democratic institutions. From the collapse of the ancient Greek democracies up to the nineteenth century, democracy was with few exceptions dismissed as a primitive and unworkable political order.³ The establishment of democratic regimes was bound to be exceptional in those circumstances, and the self-identification of regimes as democracies was unlikely given the negative attitudes to democracy that prevailed. This is not merely a matter of names; it also affected the development of regimes, curtailing certain democratic characteristics (particularly the inclusion of the property-less in the self-governing class) because of the identification of these with the stigmatized image of democracy.⁴

Keane is determined not to be tied down to an ahistorical definition of democracy. He wants to include every political order that has been described by its proponents—or even its adversaries—as democracy. In fact, he goes further: he explores the origins of democratic institutions in political orders that never understood themselves as democratic and that are usually not described in such terms, tracing the origins of democratic institutions to people's assemblies as far back as fourth millennium BCE Mesopotamia.⁵ Putting aside the question of the validity of his characterization of such institutions as proto-democratic, the fact that he can find such precursors prior to the origin of the concept of democracy shows that he does retain a standard against which he measures political institutions for their democratic character. If this is so, then it remains theoretically possible to discount as instances of democracy institutions and regimes that consciously identify themselves as democratic, if they fail to measure up to some essential sense of the term. This becomes an issue

2 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, London: Pocket Books.

3 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, London: Pocket Books, pp. 160–272.

4 Ibid.

5 Keane, J. (2010), pp. 78–155.

when Keane comes to try to justify democracy as a political regime.⁶ Here he is forced to defend a conception of democracy that is normative as well as descriptive.

Keane's ultimate conception of democracy has much to recommend it—and as we shall see, it bears many similarities to that of Castoriadis. What it lacks, however, and what Castoriadis's conception can provide, is a core idea or meaning—an imaginary signification—around which the various aspects and dimensions of the democratic constellation can be organised coherently. This core idea or meaning represents the social imaginary signification which animates and organises the project of democracy in its various interpretations and institutional forms. For Castoriadis, this central signification is *autonomy*.⁷ Without this signification, Keane's account becomes incoherent and contradictory, despite its virtues. Let us compare these conceptions of democracy, using Keane's account as a doorway into Castoriadis's understanding of democracy as social autonomy.⁸

It will be helpful to begin with a detour via Aristotle's account of democracy. This centres around two concepts of liberty: 1) to rule and be ruled in turn, and 2) to do as one likes.⁹ As Held points out, these two concepts sit together uneasily, and their potential contradiction has been the basis for much debate in democratic theory.¹⁰ It is my contention that the concept of autonomy is best fitted to bridge the gap between these two definitions of liberty, revealing their common source, and at the same time tracing the limits of each.

To be autonomous is to give oneself one's own laws. The core meaning of autonomy is therefore self-determination. To determine is *to make be as something*. To make be as *this* something, as opposed to something else, or anything at all (which would just be a 'letting be'), is to define, to limit, to specify. To make oneself be *this*, and not *that*: this is the essence of self-determination. To make is to constrain, and in this sense to rule. To be autonomous is thus to

6 Keane, J. (2010), pp. 839–887.

7 See Castoriadis, C. (1991). Curtis, D.A. (Ed.). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*; 'The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy', in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 81–123; Castoriadis, C. (Trans). Curtis, D.A. (Ed.). (1991). 'Power, Politics, Autonomy', in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 143–174.

8 Keane does not refer to Castoriadis in his book.

9 Aristotle. (1981). Sinclair, T.A. & Saunders T.J. (Trans). *The Politics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 362–364, VI iii.

10 Held, D. (2006). *Models of Democracy*. 3rd edition. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 15–17.

rule, and to be ruled, since it is to determine and to be determined by oneself. Locating the source of this rule in oneself changes its nature significantly. It ceases to be something imposed from without, with all the potential for dissonance and conflict between the imposed rule and those upon whom it is imposed. Instead we have a situation in which the person who is to be subjected to the rule is also the author of that rule, and so is entirely free to choose the rule which is consonant with his/her own wishes and desires. To be autonomous therefore also means to do as one wishes, rather than to do as someone else wishes or decides. The latter is heteronomy.

To rule and to be ruled and doing as one likes can thus be brought together consistently under the banner of autonomy. Of course, the devil is in the details, and the consistency of ruling and being ruled with doing as one likes is rendered inevitably imperfect by a number of factors, all of which have to do with the essential plurality of the human condition. Even as individuals we are never entirely homogeneous and self-consistent. Our desires and will can and often are in conflict, and as a result the rule implied in our self-determination can and often does involve conflict with doing what we like. And when we look beyond the individual to the collectivity, the potential for plurality and heterogeneity is magnified. The self-determination of the collectivity as a whole may very well conflict with the will or desire of some individuals or groups within the collectivity. Autonomy necessarily becomes a matter of compromise and balance. What should be stressed here is that, however imperfect and fraught the meshing of these two aspects of democracy may be in practice, their conjunction is completely impossible to comprehend outside of a recognition of autonomy as the common root of both. If we grasp autonomy as the essential meaning and ultimate sense of democracy, we have something against which we can test and measure various interpretations and manifestations of democracy. And this is not an arbitrary choice. Rather, it is made because of the conviction that the imaginary signification of autonomy—the idea and aim of self-determination—is what ultimately organises and animates the democratic project throughout history.

Having said that, real history is never the product of a single social-historical project animated by a single social imaginary signification. So the institutions that emerge within democracies will never be the result of the project and social imaginary signification of autonomy alone, but will inevitably incorporate alternative and potentially conflicting influences and ideas. Should we say therefore that the project of democracy is inevitably an amalgam, incorporating a diversity of significations and aims, and that it differs in different historical periods, sometimes involving self-determination as a central feature, sometimes centring on other significations, and always being a mixture?

To some extent this is a question of nomenclature, of classification, and to this extent it is not particularly interesting. Whatever names we choose they ought to be as clear as possible and not misleading, but beyond that anything is permissible. But a strong argument can be made that the term 'democracy' ought to be reserved for that which gave birth to the concept, especially if, as we have argued up to now, that which gave birth to the concept continues to operate as a driving force in all subsequent instances that may be associated with the term. The importance of this core meaning, and that which justifies us in continuing to identify it as a core or essential meaning, is the fact that when we seek to clarify what continues to inspire and impel us in relation to the concept and the historical institutions related to it, we find ourselves returning to this essential meaning, because it continues to embody values and aims we can claim as our own.

Keane sometimes does describe democracy in terms that make it synonymous with social autonomy, linking it to the idea that human beings can and should govern themselves.¹¹ But because he wants to defend democracy not by reference to this value but by reference to the historical institutions that have arisen under the heading of democracy, he ends up arguing for democracy on the basis of its positive and desirable consequences. He loses sight of the fundamental value of autonomy in his attempts to defend democracy's benefits. Keane's argument for democracy is really an argument against various forms of bad governance which he associates with non-democratic forms of government: things like the establishment of drastic disparities of power, the arbitrary use of power, the aggrandizement of rulers, and the suppression of difference and diversity.¹² This argument depends for its effectiveness upon our acceptance that these evils are more prevalent and more likely under non-democratic than democratic regimes. This is a serious weakness, because should it be asserted that democracies are equally prone to such evils, or that non-democratic regimes are as likely to produce peace and harmony, one is left with no way to defend democracy apart from a crude weighing up of historical data, data which is always open to dispute and multiple interpretations. This is always the problem with a consequentialist argument. Castoriadis, on the other hand, has no such problem. He readily admits that democracy can, has and probably will in the future produce evils, and he never tries to maintain

11 For example, Keane, J., (2010) *The Life and Death of Democracy*, London: Pocket Books. p. 872.

12 Keane, J., (2010) pp. 839–872.

that democracy makes such evils less probable.¹³ For Castoriadis, one prefers democracy not because it is a better form of governance or because it is more likely to produce a better society. Rather, one prefers democracy because one prefers self-government. Beyond that, all evils or virtues are in our hands. They are in *our* hands, which is what we want, not because it guarantees anything beyond this, but because we value self-determination in itself.

Let us explore some of the issues surrounding the evaluation of democracy singled out by Keane. He points to the controversy over the cultural specificity of democracy as a value. He cites a discussion with Richard Rorty in which Rorty recommends we desist from attempts to provide a metaphysical justification for democracy, and instead admit that it is a western value in origin and character.¹⁴ As a good pragmatist, Rorty argues that what recommends democracy to other cultures is its success. Of course, the question of how this success is measured is not broached, and this question is precisely what fuels the criticisms of western democracies by some non-westerners, who see in this success the erosion of morality and the exercise of pure self-interested power. Keane's answer is that democracy's culturally specific origin does not mean it cannot have universal significance. He proceeds to argue for that universal significance in the terms sketched above, by showing how democracy promotes certain political and social characteristics that might be regarded as universally desirable and opposes others that are universally undesirable. What he does not acknowledge is that the desirability of these characteristics is dependent on the acceptance of certain values, and in particular the value of democracy, or rather autonomy.

For Castoriadis, the cultural specificity of the value of autonomy is not a problem. All values are social-historical creations, and as such have their origin in particular cultures.¹⁵ The universalization of such values is a matter of their application to contexts beyond that of their origin, and their adoption by cultures other than their culture of origin. Once the value of autonomy is adopted all manifestations of heteronomy become anathema. But until autonomy is

13 See for example, Castoriadis, C. (1997). Curtis, D.A. (Trans & Ed.). 'The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy'; 'The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary' in *World in Fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 84–107; Curtis, D.A. (Ed.). (1997). 'Done and To Be Done', in *The Castoriadis Reader*. Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Oxford University Press, pp. 361–417; Arnold, H. (Trans). (2007). 'What Democracy?' in *Figures Of The Thinkable*, Stanford Cambridge: Stanford University Press, pp. 118–150.

14 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, pp. 842–846.

15 Castoriadis, C. (1997). 'The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy'.

adopted as a value, one has no basis for rejecting heteronomy.¹⁶ Are rulers promoted at the expense of those they rule? Why shouldn't they be? Are they regarded as superior to mere mortals? Why not? Are people bound to obey the laws set down by tradition and the gods? Isn't that is as it should be? One cannot escape the founding function of the value; nor, according to Castoriadis, can one escape the ultimately arbitrary nature of the choice of value (or, to put it another way, its spontaneous and creative character). One can give reasons for one's chosen values, certainly. But all those reasons will and must assume some value in order to function as justifications for preferring one thing to another. From Castoriadis's perspective, the centre of all moral and political discussions about the merits of democracy as an institutional order, as well as the various values and civil principles associated with it, is the social imaginary signification of autonomy, which functions as a central, guiding value, preferring self-determination to determination by another. As we shall see subsequently, that preference is strengthened by the recognition that for the most part determination by others is avoidable rather than inevitable, or that it is not ultimately determination by others but by ourselves in disguised and unrecognized forms. But none of this makes our preference for self-determination necessary.

Amongst the characteristics that recommend democracy Keane includes an awareness of the contingency of the social order, and the consequent willingness to embrace novelty in social and political organisation. In this, he is very close to Castoriadis. Both men see an awareness of contingency as central to democracy/autonomy; though Castoriadis views it as a prerequisite whereas Keane seems to see it as a product or corollary. For Castoriadis, the transformation of heteronomy depends on understanding that this heteronomy—both heteronomy in general and whatever particular heteronomous order happens

¹⁶ Keane presents a persuasive case in his book for the under-recognized influence of Christian advocates of democracy. (*The Life and Death of Democracy*, pp. 207–235.) Such activists are of course as likely as others to have been influenced by the project and value of autonomy, but there is no doubt that their Christianity itself is also a significant factor in their advocacy of democracy. This does not mean that Christianity *per se* is consonant with democracy, since certain traditions within Christianity are antagonistic to democracy. Rather, it means that certain aspects of Christianity are open to interpretations that are consonant with democracy, particularly the notion of equality of all before God, the consequent abhorrence of grandeur and self-importance, and the promotion of humility and service to others. These values can provide a basis for criticizing heteronomy in one's own or other societies; though the autonomy that may be envisaged on the basis of these same values may be limited in the way discussed below, since it is tied to a conception of a moral order that is given by God.

to prevail at the time—is not inevitable but contingent, that it is a social creation. For Castoriadis, this also means that it is ultimately our creation, and that those others we imagine to be the authors of the laws are in fact ourselves in disguise.

Consider the following passage from Castoriadis.

Society is a form of self-creation. Until now, however, its instituting has been a self-instituting which is occulted from itself. This self-occultation is, as a matter of fact, the fundamental characteristic of heteronomy in societies. In heteronomous societies, that is to say, in the overwhelming majority of societies which have existed up to the present time—almost all of them—we find, institutionally established and sanctioned, the representation of a source of the instituting of society that only can be found outside of this society: among the gods, in God, among the ancestors, in the laws of Nature, in the laws of Reason, in the laws of History. In other words, we find imposed upon the individuals in these societies a representation to the effect that the instituting of society does not depend on them, that they cannot lay down for themselves their own law—for that would mean autonomy—but rather that this law is already given by someone else. There is therefore a self-occultation of the self-institution of society and this is an integral part of the society's heteronomy.¹⁷

Keane's line is very similar. The following may be read as a continuation of the story begun by Castoriadis in the preceding quote.

When democracy takes hold of people's lives, it gives them a glimpse of the contingency of things. They are injected with the feeling that the world can be other than it is—that situations can be countered, outcomes altered, people's lives changed through individual and collective actions. . . . Democracy as well urged people to see through talk of gods and nature and rulers claiming privileges based on some or other alleged superior quality. Democracy insisted that nobody be allowed to sit on thrones built of power backed by bogus big beliefs. It meant self-government, the lawful rule of people whose sovereign power to decide things was no longer to be given over to imaginary gods or Tradition, or to omniscient despots, to those in the know, or simply handed over to the

17 Castoriadis, C. (1991). Curtis, D.A. (Trans) 'The Nature and Value of Equality'. In Curtis, D.A. (Ed.) *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. ed. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 132–133.

everyday habit of indifference, so allowing others to decide matters of importance on their behalf.¹⁸

Keane links this developing culture of democracy to what he describes as a disjunction between the mundane and transmundane worlds.

Democracy supposes the willingness of people to spot a disjunction between their transmundane and mundane worlds. It requires them to think and act in terms of a chasm or tension that separates a higher transcendent moral or metaphysical order...and the everyday world of human beings living together within earthly institutions. Democracy further supposes that there is no straightforward homology between these two otherwise connected worlds. It therefore implies that the mundane realities of the everyday world are 'up for grabs', that is, are capable of ordering and reordering by human beings whose eyes are fixed for at least some of the time on *this* world and not *that* world extending through, above and beyond human intervention.¹⁹

Though Keane never references him, this idea of a chasm between the transcendent and the mundane was developed by the sociologist Schmuël Eisenstadt, and it was developed by him not as an analysis of the culture of democracy specifically but of Axial Age societies in general. The Axial Age societies are a group of societies which underwent profound cultural and structural changes over a period of about five hundred years, from around 800 to 300 BCE. These societies include ancient Israel and Greece, Zoroastrian Iran, early Imperial China, and India during the time of the Brahminism of the original Upanishads and the emergence of Buddhism. A number of other civilizational complexes—most notably Christianity and Islam—are regarded as 'secondary breakthroughs' which build on an original Axial Age transformation. As the breadth of this collection suggests, the characteristics which these societies are purported to share are of a very general character and coincide with profound differences. Nonetheless, Eisenstadt has accumulated compelling evidence pointing to a similar pattern of revolutionary change within many of these societies.²⁰

18 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, pp. 853–854.

19 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, pp. 854–855.

20 Eisenstadt, S.N. (1986). *A Sociological Approach to Comparative Civilisations: The Development and Directions of a Research Program*. Jerusalem: The Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem; Eisenstadt,

According to Eisenstadt, this pattern involves a fundamental alteration of the dominant world-view within these societies, accompanied by major changes in social structure and internal dynamics. The idea of a chasm between the transcendental and mundane orders emerges, this idea being carried and promoted by new and relatively independent cultural elites. These groups push for the active reconstruction of the social world in accordance with a transcendental vision or command. This activity has profound consequences for the institutional structure of these societies and for the nature and distribution of power within them. One observes the development of cultural or religious collectivities which represent themselves as the privileged carriers of visions of social reconstruction or 'salvation'. As these new elites succeed in influencing, creating or assuming control of institutions of power, there is a tendency for the development of "a high degree of symbolic orientation and ideologization of some central aspects of the institutional structure, above all the structure of collectivities, societal centers and the process of political struggle."²¹ This coincides with an increasing cultural systematization, rationalization and pluralization. This is in turn associated with increased intrasocietal differentiation and conflict, the development of distinctive cultural and political centres and peripheries, struggles between these, the emergence of movements of protest and rebellion, the development of more overt and systematic methods of political and cultural control, and so on.

The foregoing account suggests that the disjunction between the transmundane and mundane, while perhaps necessary for any breakthrough to democracy, is not sufficient to produce such a breakthrough, and that the recognition of such a disjunction is not peculiar to democracy, and can be consistent with a distinctively non-democratic culture and politics. Keane is closer to something specific to democracy when he talks about the lack of a straightforward homology between the mundane and transmundane worlds. Axial Age religious reformers recognised such a lack of homology as a fact, but a fact that to some degree at least could and should be changed by bringing the mundane order into line with the transcendent. Democracy depends on an understanding which views this as unnecessary, impossible or undesirable. It requires a freedom to act within the mundane, earthly realm without an eye to the authority of the transcendent, either because the transcendent has nothing definitive to say about what our mundane order should be, because we have

S.N. (Ed.) (1986). *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilisations*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press.

21 Eisenstadt, S.N. (1986). *A Sociological Approach to Comparative Civilisations: The Development and Directions of a Research Program*, p. 32.

been specifically freed by the transcendent to choose for ourselves, or because we no longer believe that there is a transcendent order.

Castoriadis certainly prefers the last of these options, and not just as a personal choice, but for three other reasons. First, because he believes that a vision of an incompletely ordered and self-ordering cosmos was a crucial cultural prerequisite and corollary to the development of democracy in Ancient Greece.²² The implication is that the project of autonomy thrives best within such a cosmological and ontological framework. But if Castoriadis argues in favour of adopting such a world view, this is not simply or primarily because of its consonance with the project of autonomy, but because he regards it as the best and truest understanding of things. This is the second reason: truth. If one supposes that we are determined by forces outside ourselves when these forces do not exist and/or do not determine us, then we remain within an occulted heteronomy, even if this heteronomy becomes less restrictive than previously. Awareness of contingency is worthwhile only if we believe it is true that social orders are contingent. Despite his attempt to give a balanced account, one which respects different religious views and acknowledges the positive role of some varieties of Christianity in the promotion and development of democracy, one cannot help but detect a note of triumphalism in Keane's description of the overturning of superstitious faith in false gods. This is not to criticize Keane. A sense of triumph at liberation from false gods and idols is entirely warranted; but then so is a continuing rejection of what one views as equally false gods and idols, if that is how one views them.

Of course, degrees are possible. Castoriadis believes that almost everything that people attributed to the gods or nature in fact comes from our own creative activity, including the order of values and morality. One *could* believe that some aspects of the moral order are given, or that, if created by us, they are created in response to something that is given, by nature or by God, and one will still believe that down to a certain depth at least, the social order is contingent and changeable. One's vision of democracy would be less radical than, say, Castoriadis's, but one could still describe oneself as a democrat providing one recognized that what we make of the contingent dimension of the social order is transparently our own creation. Of course, the complimentary criticism of the radical attitude is that it denies the truth of givenness, and so fails to respect limitations it should. Though some may believe Castoriadis is guilty

22 Castoriadis, C. (1997). 'The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy'.

of this, I think his warnings against hubris²³ and his expressions of respect for the order of the natural world²⁴ suggest otherwise.

The third reason for rejecting the notion of a transcendent order is the danger that such a belief, however limited a vision of the transcendent we begin with, will end up undermining autonomy. This is the danger that if we accept some aspects of the fundamental order of things as given, this givenness will tend to spread and infect other areas and elements. Talking about the lack of homology between *this* world and *that*, as Keane does, focuses on the crucial issue: a freedom of determination within *this* world, the human domain of society and history. The threat to such a freedom is the notion of a determined order than embraces all domains. This is what Castoriadis describes as a unitary ontology, one which links signification (meaning), and hence the order of society, and being, the nature and order of the cosmos, in a manner that determines both together.²⁵ The linkage of the mundane and the transcendent realms is one form of such a unitary ontology, but so is the reduction of human phenomena to natural-material processes. So too is the ontology Castoriadis spent most time critiquing, the ensidic logic-ontology of determinacy which by its equation of being with determinacy provides a philosophical foundation for undermining human autonomy even where it ostensibly champions it, because it denies the human capacity for creativity. This path leads to the novelty Keane rightly associates with democracy being reduced to the implementation of scientifically validated principles and policies of government.²⁶

Keane advocates a pluralistic defence of democracy, allowing a multiplicity of justifications based around different conceptions of the good life. What Keane would like to see is a move away from grand philosophical ideas, of which he is highly suspicious and which he regards as relics of a former era, to more humble justifications of democracy tied to how actual democratic institutional orders operate to allow people to live in ways they value.²⁷ Absolute and inflexible ideologies are better avoided, of course, and have a great potential for evil of various sorts, including trampling upon both opponents and the

23 Castoriadis, C., (1997). 'The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy'; 'What Democracy?'; 'Done and To Be Done'.

24 Castoriadis, C. (1997). 'From Ecology to Autonomy' in *The Castoriadis Reader*. Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Oxford University Press, pp. 239–252.

25 Castoriadis, C. (1997). Curtis, D.A. (Trans & Ed.). 'The Institution of Society and Religion'. In *World in Fragments*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 311–330.

26 For further explication and discussion of this topic, see Klooger, J. (2009). *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy*, Leiden: Brill.

27 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, pp. 846–851.

merely different. But the weakness of this approach is that it tends to produce a catalogue of qualities which have no organic unity, and which are not just incoherent but which potentially come into conflict with one another. The remedy is to find a fundamental signification—that of autonomy—as an anchor, around which can be floated a variety of interpretations. As long as they are tied to the one anchor, they cannot float away and come into conflict, and their justification is immediately apparent in their connection to the anchoring signification. The association with such a fundamental signification is a far cry from the sort of absolute and comprehensive determination Keane deplores in metaphysical justifications of democracy. The idea of autonomy is entirely agnostic as to what a good life must look like, except in one detail: that part of a good life is that it be self-determining. In this way, it avoids being all-determining, but it is not just anything. The problem with Keane's proposed non (or no)-doctrinaire justification of democracy is that, on the one hand, it admits as positive attributes of democracy some institutional characteristics that go against the aim of self-determination, while on the other hand the signification of self-determination continues to lurk as an unthematized element underlying the idea of democracy.

For example, Keane lauds democracy as a type of political order in which nobody rules. He quickly clarifies this point: democratic institutions “ideally dispense with *rule*, if by that is meant bossing over others who have few or no means of redress.”²⁸ Put aside for the moment the fact that this ideal state is seldom true for all democratic citizens, and admit that it is true of more citizens in modern western democracies than it usually is for citizens of other polities. Many more people are likely to have some means of redress and appeal against government decisions in a democracy. But is this a primary benefit of democracy, and even if it is, from whence does it arise? If it happens to be a fact that this softening of the exercise of power is a consequence of the development of modern democracy, what is the basis of this softening? Consider that even if democracies exhibit this softening more so than other types of political order, that does not mean that there is never a means of redress in non-democratic orders. Civil rights are not an essentially democratic invention, even if they have been advanced under democracies. The peculiarly democratic contribution to the curtailing of untrammelled power has been the idea that all citizens should have the right and opportunity to participate in the processes of government. So, it is not that nobody should rule, but that everybody should rule, where rule is understood not in the highly limited sense Keane proposes, but the much broader sense of determination and legislation.

28 Castoriadis, C. (1997). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, p. 856.

This idea of the rule of nobody is associated by Keane with the development of what we call 'monitory democracy'. It is a major thesis of his book that the era of representative democracy has given way since the end of World War II to a new form of democracy in which the checks and balances on power are multiplied. This is accompanied by an expansion and extension of the organisational and procedural forms of democracy, such as deliberative bodies and assemblies, limited tenure office holders, delegation of powers to representatives, and so on, so that these become the preponderant forms for the organisation and conduct of social activities far beyond the functions of central parliaments. What most characterizes this new era is the pluralization of power centres and of agencies which exercise a monitoring function over power centres.²⁹ In such an order, "nobody rules in the sense that those who govern others are subject constantly to the ideal of public chastening, tied down by a thousand Lilliputian strings of scrutiny."³⁰

Keane's analysis of the changing nature of democratic institutions has much merit. He is right to point to the multiplication of monitoring agencies, the establishment of networks of scrutiny associated with a plurality of interests and issues. He sees this as a positive development, or at least one ripe with the potential for positive effects, and he is particularly impressed with the way in which this new institutional order undermines the notion of unified and homogeneous sovereignty. Instead we are faced with the reality of a plurality of communities of interest, and citizens are even permitted membership of multiple such communities simultaneously. Their voting power is therefore multiplied (and also divided, so one might ask whether the sum is altered) as they add their weight in a number of directions in relation to a number of issues as members of different communities. These are real and important developments. Keane sees them as positive and essentially democratic in nature because he associates democracy with the dissipation and equalization of power. Central authorities are weakened as agencies of scrutiny multiply, and people are consequently freer from arbitrary rule. However, the weakness of this as a justification of democracy can be seen immediately in the above quote. Nobody rules, because "those who govern others" are themselves subject to chastening and scrutiny, being "tied down by a thousand Lilliputian strings." We are, it is apparent, still in the realm of giants and little people. (In his book, Keane actually includes an illustration from Gulliver's travels to ram home his point.) In this scenario, there are still some who govern others and

29 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, pp. 648–747.

30 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, p. 856.

some who are governed, those who govern are still giants compared to the little people who are governed, and the only thing the system has to recommend it is that the giants are held in check by the combined weight of the assembled Lilliputians. Granted it is better for the powerful to be tied down, but is this sufficient for a democracy? It may well be the best that our actually existing democracies have achieved, but is it all that they aim for or mean, and is it enough reason to adopt democracy as a goal and value? And if one does adopt democracy as goal and value, is this all that one is adopting, the commitment to dilute and control the power of government over the governed? If so, what becomes of the idea of self-government which even Keane periodically returns to, without fully articulating its significance?

Apart from its inadequacy, this justification of democracy by reference to the innovation of monitory institutions does not sufficiently recognize or explore the negatives of such an institutional order from the viewpoint of democracy. A multiplication of monitoring agencies may weaken central power, but it may also dissipate the capacity for self-determination. It may become more difficult to act decisively to produce deliberate social transformation at the scale of a whole society. This may avoid the evils of centrally planned social engineering, but at the same time it may cripple the capacity for communities to transform themselves through collective action. There is a continuing question as to who benefits and who is left most empowered by the establishment of highly complex and multiple networks of interest communities and monitoring agencies. To whom are the monitoring agencies accountable? To the founding principles that guide their actions? And who decides these principles? Who is best equipped to act effectively in the complex network of national and international agencies and interest groups? Is it individuals or corporations; visible, formal groups and bodies, or informal and subterranean forces? The answers to such questions are not simple or obvious. Whatever these answers may be, I would contend that from a democratic perspective any overall judgement as to the merits of a monitory political order ought to be tied to an assessment of its effect on the capacity for social autonomy, and not merely on its tendency to weaken the power of heteronomous government.

The final comparison I wish to make concerns Keane's admission that democracy is always unfinished and imperfect.

Democracy is never more alive than when it senses its incompleteness. It thrives on imperfection. Those who accuse it of hypocrisy and condemn its poor performance fail to see that democracy is process. Democracy is always on the move. It is not a finished performance, only a set of actions

that are always in rehearsal. It is not something that is done and dusted, never a mechanism that has come to rest, as though it had reached its steady state. Democracy must always become democracy again.³¹

Keane is onto something profoundly true about democracy here, but he confounds a number of different and conflicting characteristics into the one description. Democracy is amongst the most active and dynamic forms of social-historical self-creation, and it is so dynamic because and insofar as it is a manifestation of the project of social autonomy. As such, it is the effort to remake one's own social institutions in accordance with one's own will and conscious judgements, and to create new institutions to replace old ones. If it is always on the move, it is because this creation is a perpetual process, and because any self-determination can never be perfect and complete, for reasons which go beyond the limited capacities of human beings and have to do with the ontological impossibility of full and complete determination (which I cannot explore further here).³² It is unfinished for another reason, too: the fact that autonomy is a project, meaning that its aim is not merely this or that self-determination, but the fostering of the continuing capacity for autonomy as an indeterminate beginning rather than a determinate end.³³ For both these reasons, democracy never reaches its steady state, as Keane observes.

However, this does not mean that every form of incompleteness and imperfection is equal. A democracy can also be incomplete and imperfect because it does not yet realize the fundamental aim of democracy which is social autonomy. The problem with Keane's account is that he lumps all imperfections together, casting all as equally laudable and essential to the democratic enterprise. The fact that democracy is a process does not mean that its hypocrisies should be ignored or even forgiven, or that its poor performance is tolerable. A democracy that has established a genuine social autonomy would still be a process, and would still have faults and limitations; but a so-called democracy that has not established social autonomy is a process in a different sense: it is still in the process of becoming or creating democracy—if, indeed, it really is in the process of recreating itself as democracy rather than merely claiming to do so, or to have done so already. The twentieth century has left us plenty of currently uncontroversial examples of regimes of the latter type, and perhaps there are other as yet unacknowledged ones. Many other of these 'imperfect and incomplete' democracies may be genuinely products

31 Keane, J. (2010). *The Life and Death of Democracy*, pp. 866–867.

32 See Klooger. (2009). *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy*.

33 Castoriadis, C. (1987). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, pp. 71–78.

(or co-products) of the project of autonomy, but without thereby becoming or being democracies in the true or full sense. Keane recognizes this when he says that democracy must always become democracy again. Even once democracy *qua* social autonomy has been established there is always the risk of devolution and destruction of that autonomy, and constant effort and vigilance is necessary to maintain a true and real autonomy.

When democracy fails to maintain itself as autonomy, or when it never fully reaches that goal, it must revivify itself by reference to its own fundamental aim, measuring and critiquing itself in comparison to that ideal. Notwithstanding its monumental scholarship and attention to historical detail, Keane's account risks undermining the capacity for such a self-correction of democracy. By equating the virtues of democracy too completely with the achievements of the institutional forms that have emerged and predominated under the rubric of democracy, he undermines the capacity to measure those institutions against unrealized aims, and to reform them in view of unrealized ideals. By tying our image of democracy too closely to what has existed and what currently exists, he limits our ability to imagine democracy as something other than the merely real and already achieved.

Autonomy, Oligarchy, *Statesman*: Weber, Castoriadis and the Fragility of Politics

John Rundell

Introduction

The works of Max Weber and Cornelius Castoriadis offer an analysis of political modernity which highlights conflicting models of power and the political, and, more importantly, the fragility of democratic forms of politics. Weber's *The City* and Castoriadis's study *On Plato's Statesman* both elucidate a continual confrontation and conflict between at least three different models of power that have been bequeathed to modernity—the royal or stately-sovereign, the oligarchic and the democratic. By way of an examination of Weber's study on medieval city states and the model of Athenian democracy drawn on by Castoriadis, this essay will discuss these issues from the vantage point of [modern] constitutional republics in order to draw out the interrelation between the circulation of power and the contingency of democratic political forms.

In Castoriadis's terms, the first two models of the royal-sovereign and the oligarchic are closed and heteronomous, whilst the democratic is more or less synonymous with, what he terms, second-order autonomy.¹ In contrast, Weber equates the royal-sovereign form with patrimonialism, but it could also be seen as encompassing the modern bureaucratic state because the principle of rulership over subjects occurs in formal-legally rational terms and is also equivalent to legitimate domination. The oligarchic and the democratic, for Weber, are forms of non-legitimate domination when they are found outside the realm of the state, that is, for example, in the *polois* of Greek Antiquity and the Renaissance cities. This paper will concentrate on Weber's and Castoriadis's respective versions, interpretations and critiques of these models, especially if cities rather than states are taken as paradigm cases for not only an analysis of the past but also the present.² Moreover, these two studies indicate that autonomy and democracy are

1 Although, as will be indicated below, it has quite a specific meaning for Castoriadis.

2 By making the past speak, by asking questions self-consciously raised by the present, the past is turned into an interlocutor rather than either an object that can be dissected or re-assembled in the manner of a forensic anthropologist qua scientist, or a corpse that can

fragile 'regimes', that is, their creation, success and longevity are indeterminate and contingent and there is no guarantee of their perpetuation.

In order to draw out these themes, then, this essay proceeds in three parts: firstly, the central themes underlying the studies by Weber and Castoriadis will be discussed in terms of the central notions of explicit power, the political and politics. Secondly, Weber's analysis of medieval city-states will be investigated in terms of competing models of democratic breakthroughs, corporatism, the circulation of power and the closure of politics; and finally, Castoriadis's study of Plato's *Statesman* will draw out the creation of autonomy, heteronomy and the perpetual conflict between open and closed social and political imaginaries, and the consequences for democratic formations.

Explicit Power, the Political, Politics

In the context of these opening remarks it is helpful to introduce a distinction that Castoriadis puts forward between *explicit power*, *the political* and *politics*. In Castoriadis's view, *explicit power* is a functional necessity that legislates, executes decisions, settles points of litigation and governs, and it occurs in both state and non-state societies.³ In other words, it functions as a quasi 'anthropological universal' in that explicit power is exercised in all societies. Although the relationality of power is under-theorised in Castoriadis's work there is an assumption that he makes that power is a social relation or intersubjective

be picked over by crows. The reading from the present is also addressed with particular reference to the Greeks by Ruprecht, Louis A. 'Why the Greeks?' in *Agon, Logos, Polis*, and Heller, Agnes. Rundell, J. (Ed.). (2011). 'The Gods of Greece' in *Aesthetics and Modernity Essays by Agnes Heller*. Lanham: Lexington. On the issue of hermeneutics, creativity and the relation between the present and its pasts see also Rundell, J. (1998) 'The Hermeneutic Imagination and Imaginary Activity: Ourselves, Others, Autonomy'. *Divinatio*, Vol. 8, pp. 87–110.

- 3 See Castoriadis, (1991). 'Power, Politics, Autonomy'. In Curtis, Davis, A. (Trans and Ed.). *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy Essays on Political Philosophy*. pp. 143–174. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 'Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime, *Constellations*, (1997) Vol. 4, Issue 1, pp. 1–18; David Ames Curtis (Ed.). (1997). *The Castoriadis Reader*. 'Done and to be Done'. pp. 361–417. Oxford: Blackwell; Claude Lefort's work on the political is beyond the scope of this paper. See, for example, his (1986). Thompson, J.B. (Ed. and Intro). *The Political Forms of Modern Society*. Oxford. Blackwell (2007); *Complications Communism and the Dilemmas of Democracy*. Bourg, J. (Trans). Howard, D. (Foreword). Columbia: Columbia University Press. See also Hendly, S. (1998) 'Reconsidering the Limits of Democracy with Lefort and Castoriadis'. In Langsdorf, L. Stephen, H. Watson, K. Smith, A. (Eds.). *Reinterpreting the Political*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

form rather than simply an imposition of something. In this context, there can be either asymmetrical or symmetrical relations of explicit power that are co-constituted by social imaginaries, although it is the latter that remains Castoriadis's abiding concern.⁴ Intersubjective or figurational relations that are articulated through explicit power, and which construct patterns of identity between ego and alter can be viewed as patterns of action in which a dimension of reciprocating interaction is assumed. Explicit power occurs, for example, in the personal relation between a master, his slaves, spouse or offspring in the traditional household or *oikos*, as it does in the more functionally determined modern setting between office holders where impersonal rules determine hierarchies of power. Alternatively, explicit power may take the form of a pattern of interaction in which the reciprocity is denied altogether, the pure form is not necessarily the traditional household but the exterminist, sacrificial, and especially the holocaustal one. Here cruelty, which denies the existence of the other, rather than only explicit power, reigns.⁵

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- 4 See for example, Castoriadis, (Winter 1976–77) 'The History of the Worker's Movement', *Telos*, No. 30, pp. 3–42. Here it should be noted that explicit power should not be viewed in the standard Weberian way as a 'thing', a resource or object that is imposed and dominates. Rather, it is a social relation and a contestatory one at that. Elias' work is instructive here. In his terms, there are power ratios or balances between social actors or groups with their relative strengths and weaknesses, strategies and counter-strategies. In other words, power is not a "thing", an instrument, for Elias. Instead of speaking about power externally imposed, Elias proposes that we speak of figurations, ratios and balances that are internal features of any social relation. Power, is thus not blunt. Leaving his thesis of civilizing processes to one side, Elias' model of power also builds in the forms of self-perceptions and definitions that are internalized by groups and projected upon others as a co-determining, non-rational and non-calculative dimension. In Elias' view, the development of perceptions that form and maintain identity of both self and other is an integral part of any power relation or figurational form. See Elias, N. (1978) Mennell, S. and Morrissey, G. (Trans). *What is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press, and with. Scotson, John L. (1994) *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological study into Community Problems*, 2nd edition. London: Sage. This places Elias' idea of power closer to Weber's notion of open and closed social relationships, as well as Marx's idea of contestatory social relations which he portrays in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, for example, and even Foucault's action-based notion of power in his 'The Subject and Power'. See also Petherbridge, D. (2013) on this reading of Foucault in *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth Anthropology, Recognition, Power*. Lanham: Lexington. Hence it is more appropriate here to speak of shifts in balances of power which swing between open or closed forms.
- 5 On the issue of cruelty see Rundell, J. (2012). 'Violence, Cruelty, Power: Reflections on Heteronomy' in *Cosmos and History The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*. Vol. 8, no. 8, pp. 3–20. Cruelty, especially in its form as radical evil, makes reflexive heteronomy

The *political* is everything that concerns this explicit power from the question of access, its modes and dynamics, to the ways of managing and limiting it. The political, thus encompasses the ways in which forms and codes of access are instituted through which explicit power might be wielded, for example in courtly settings as much as democratic forms in which both the question of access to explicit power as well as its dimensions might be altered and even limited. As is well known, for Weber and Elias, the political enables explicit power, including its deployment through physical force and violence, to be monopolized, and for them the primary social institution that monopolises explicit power is the state.⁶ It is this monopolisation that gives the state—which they equate with the political—its legitimacy. Moreover, in their view, as well as variants of historical materialism, the political can also hold a monopoly over the forms and cultural patterns of meaning and its referents, and because of this dimension of meaning power and violence are not simply physically determined acts but culturally created and imbedded ones. The political also attains legitimacy through its monopolisation of cultural meaning—in other words, it sets the terms and the conditions of the cultural field.

It is in the context of altering and thus limiting the political that Castoriadis defines *politics*. Both *explicit power* and *the political* are present in disputes, arguments, wins and losses but when politics is created three internal dimensions also change. For Castoriadis, politics, or what he also terms autonomy, is tied to the historically invented moments of reflexivity, which, more precisely, concerns putting into question established institutions, and, thus, the nature, organization and exercise of *explicit power* and *the political*. In addition, when subordinated or sublated to *politics*, *explicit power* and *the political* are organised in an open way that entails that they are both instituted by the social membership and circulate throughout the political body. More importantly, reflexivity, self-institution and circulation places limits on the exercise of explicit power and the political. The implication here is that in the politics of autonomous or autochthonous cities *the political* becomes contin-

completely self-enclosed. I argue elsewhere that neither explicit power nor cruelty exhaust the 'anthropological universality' of human inter-subjective forms—love and friendship are two such other dimensions.

- 6 See Weber, M. (1970). 'Politics as a Vocation'. In Gerth, H.H. and Wright Mills, C. (Trans and Eds.). *From Max Weber*. pp. 77–128. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (2000). Jephcott, E. (Trans). *The Civilising Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic investigation*. With some notes and corrections by the author and Dunning, E. Goudsblom, E. and Mennell, S. (Eds.). Oxford: Blackwell.

gent, or in Castoriadis's terms indeterminate, that is, no longer reliant upon legitimisation based on the monopolisation of power and culture.⁷

It is these aspects of the formation and self-institution of *politics* or autonomy, the circulation of *explicit power* and the capacity for reflexivity or questioning that are the particular foci here. Weber's analysis of the Renaissance city states in his largely neglected work *The City*, and Castoriadis' *On Plato's Statesman* can be drawn on in order to elaborate contours, conflicts and tensions between not only the royal and the republican, but also between the democratic and the oligarchic. Even though this discussion moves between two different levels of analysis—the sociological and the philosophical—it is possible to suggest that similar analyses of *explicit power*, *the political* and *politics* can be found in Weber's and Castoriadis's work. In Weber's analysis these patterns are analysed in terms of the way in which the urban burghers and guilds usurp power from the royal sovereign and establish forms of autonomous rule in the autchthonous worlds of the Medieval cities. For Castoriadis, Plato's *Statesman* is instructive in that it portrays arguments that were used, and continue to be used in different registers, that challenged the formation of autonomy, even when it has been instituted as a social imaginary. In both cases each writer notices both the indeterminacy of *politics* and its fragility, an observation that has continuing relevance today.

Non-legitimate Domination in the Work of Max Weber—Open and Closed Circulations of *the Political*

There is no doubt that for Castoriadis the work of Max Weber is a much admired and much visited *oeuvre*. However, the Weber he visits, admires and criticises is one that emphasises the meeting point between individual action and historical development in the types of social action that are overburdened by neo-Kantian rationalism.⁸

7 Castoriadis. (1991). 'Power, Politics, Autonomy'. pp. 143–176; 'Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime', pp. 12–17. Castoriadis would make a distinction between politically constituted and affective explicit power, and heteronomously constituted explicit power. For him, *ekklesia* or the public/public domain is the site of the political.

8 See Castoriadis, C. (1991). 'Individual, Society, Rationality, History', in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. Especially pp. 47–59. See also his discussion of Renaissance cities in 'The History of the Workers Movement' and *The Rising Tide of Insignificance*, especially 'Complexity, Magma, History: The example of the Medieval Town', translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service, pp. 363–386.

However, if we take *The City* as our point of reference another Weber emerges apart from the one concerned with formal-legal rationality, purposive or instrumental rationalisation, and the tension between teleological and contingent visions of historical development. This text also represents a rupture or at least an opening in Weber's work concerning his observation and interpretation of political power. As noted above, for him, the state-form of the political and legitimacy go hand-in-hand. In this context and by contrast, the city-form is a non-legitimate form of the political in a double sense, for Weber. It is less significant as it stands outside state-formation and is, historically speaking, for him, a parallel, yet idiosyncratic form of social organisation mainly determined by the market and trade rather than the political. In another sense, it is more significant for his historical sociology because it is a rich setting in which he can explore the contours, vicissitudes and exercise of explicit power in a context that exudes *politics*. Yet, for him, the occidental city remains an enigma of politics because it resists absorption into his narrative concerning occidental purposive rationalisation.

The City concerns one of Weber's few, if only studies or meditations on the formation of the political and politics between and within groups outside of the state. These city-based groups constitute or 'figure' the political in ways that work from the position of either closure and circumscription, thus limiting its circulation, or its opening and thus rupture.⁹ It suffices to mention that for Weber the contingent formation of the autochthonous occidental city involved the following characteristics that come together, even though they had historically existed separately in different cities throughout the world. These characteristics are that urban landownership was always alienable rather than a right of inheritance; city communities viewed themselves as associations that owned and controlled property; and that this associationalism also entailed that the occidental city began to view itself as a political and legal entity. Moreover, this confraternal corporatisation of the city also dissolved clan ties and, in addition to the corporations or guilds, members of the occidental city joined it on an individual basis as citizens, even though this may have been religiously mediated. Finally, the city developed a legal and normative category of freedom which gave people a new status as free citizens. Here the universality

9 This essay builds on although from another direction my analysis of Weber's *The City* (1986) in 'Democratic Revolutions, Power and the City: Weber and Political Modernity. *Thesis Eleven*, 97, pp. 81–98. In the context of the current essay, Weber's analysis of particular city states will be the main focus. In other words, Weber's more formal arguments concerning city types and the formation of the occidental city more generally will be left to one side as I have discussed this elsewhere.

of Christianity provided a cultural framework for a secularising political interpretation, as against the particularistic religion cults of the ancient cities. For Weber, all of these developments were spontaneous rather than derived from or were 'granted' by Royal-sovereign decree. In other words, the occidental cities were revolutionary spaces of increasing legal, political, bureaucratic-professional and militarily organised autonomy.¹⁰

Weber's analysis of ancient Greek city states and their comparisons with Renaissance ones will be left to one side as it is the latter that are of primary interest here, especially his analysis of the patrician and plebeian city states.¹¹ For Weber, the patrician city states, for example Venice, represent a prime example of oligarchic republican power, whilst the plebeian ones, for example Sienna, represent the rupture of a closed circulation of power, and the formation of an open form. Each of these republican forms, though, is, in Weber's analysis, a spontaneous political formation not reliant on, nor derived from that of the (patrimonial) state.¹²

Let's begin with Weber's analysis of Venice.

For Weber, Venice is noteworthy for many reasons. It represents the formation of a thalassic or sea-based trading empire that, like the Athenian one, was city-based, rather than formed around the resources of a patrimonial state. Yet, unlike the Athenian one, its revolutionary character, as Weber portrays it, was one that concerned the oligarchic monopolisation of Venice by a guild patriciate. As Weber notes, 'the Venetian empire, extending over ever larger mainland

10 Weber, M. (1978). Roth, G. and Claus Wittich, C. (Eds.). *The City*, in *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2., pp. 1236–1262. Berkeley: California University Press.

11 On the political innovations and some assessments of Weber's interpretation of the Greek city states see the following works by Finley, (1973). M.I. *Politics in the Ancient World*, *The World of Odysseus*, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*. See also Kurt A. Raaflaub, (2009) 'Introduction', Kurt A. Raaflaub and Robert W. Wallace "People's Power" and the Egalitarian Trends in Archaic Greece', Robert W. Wallace, 'Revolutions and a New Order in Solonian Athens', Kurt A. Raaflaub, 'The Breakthrough of *Demokratia* in Mid-Fifth Century Athens', Cynthia Farrar, 'Power to the People', all in Kurt A. Raaflaub, Josiah Ober, and Robert W. Wallace, (2008). *Origins of democracy in Ancient Greece*; Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, principles and ideology*; Cynthia Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking The invention of politics in classical Athens*; Pierre Lévêque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Cleisthenes the Athenian An essay on the representation of space and time in Greek political thought from the end of the sixth century to the death of Plato*; Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and tragedy in Ancient Greece*; Michael Scott, *From Democrats to Kings The downfall of Athens to the Epic rise of Alexander the Great*.

12 Weber, (1986). *The City*, p. 1250. For a discussion of Renaissance cities see also Lauro Martines, (1979). *Power and Imagination City-States in Renaissance Italy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

territories [and sea routes] and increasingly based on mercenary armies, presents an especially pure and extreme case of the development of a patrician city'.¹³

Beginning in the ninth century the formation of the Venetian republican oligarchy involved struggles concerning the inheritability or otherwise of a city kingship, the urban nobility and the church. The outcome of these struggles was, as Weber notes, the domination of the urban nobility by the guild patriciate which began under 'rather democratic legal means'.¹⁴ The struggle resulted in the demotion of the doge 'to the status of a strictly controlled salaried official hemmed in by obstructive court ceremonials, and socially reduced him to a *primus inter peres* in the corporation of the nobleman'.¹⁵ In Weber's view, though, the thalassic context is crucial—the financial burden of imperial trading policy, which also included military power, fell to the purview of the city commune and not the prince (or *doge*). Thus, as Weber points out, it was in the hands of the patrician ruled city of Venice that monetary wealth and political power came to be concentrated.¹⁶ 'The nobility was forced to enrol in guilds if it wanted to participate in the city government . . . [The] burgher remained a guild member even if he was no longer an active entrepreneur'.¹⁷ The basic struggles, though, were not economic, but *political* through the competition over electoral constituencies and the form that the medieval oligarchic corporatism took. As Weber again points out, 'the increasing power of the craft guilds is shown by the growing dependency of all urban citizenship rights on membership of one of the occupational associations'.¹⁸ In other words, the Renaissance oligarchic republican city was constituted through corporate or guild status groups.¹⁹

This concentration of explicit power and the political in a corporatistically mediated oligarchic structure, and in contrast to the thrust of Weber's more economically orientated analysis, resulted in a gradual series of reductions and closures of the political along the following lines: 'the *de facto* disenfranchisement of the assembly of landowners []; the nomination of the *doge* by a small electoral college of *nobili*, the *de facto* limitation of the selection of officials to

13 Weber, *The City*, (1986), p. 1272.

14 Weber, *The City*, p. 1269.

15 Weber, *The City*, p. 1269.

16 Weber *The City*, p. 1270, emphasis in the original.

17 Weber, *The City*, p. 1294.

18 Weber, *The City*, p. 1294.

19 Weber, *The City*, p. 1296.

families considered eligible for council seats, and also the final formal closure of their list []'.²⁰

As far as Weber is concerned, these series of closures resulted in the formation of an oligarchically structured republic by an urban patriciate which tightly controlled political and economic life. It is also worth following Weber closely here too, for this new urban patriciate with its organisational form accomplished an administrative revolution along the following lines. It involved the competitive separation of powers, whereby administrative, military, and judicial power were separated yet competed with one another. However, even though these offices competed, they were always in the hands of members of the urban patriciate, and tenure of these offices was short-term and overseen by administrative officials. Another mechanism of control was also instituted that had long lasting consequences—a political court of inquisition was created, which turned into a permanent agency with jurisdiction over political offences. This political court 'ultimately supervised the entire political and personal conduct of the *nobili*, not infrequently annulled decisions of the 'Great Council', and altogether acquired a kind of tribunitian power, the exercise of which in a swift and secret procedure secured it paramount authority in the commune'.²¹

For Weber, and because of these complex and interlocking forms of closure, the real revolution of the Renaissance occurred in the Plebian cities where 'the rule of the patriciate was broken'.²² In other words, medieval cities such as Milan, Sienna and Luca initiated the first modern democratic revolutions.²³

20 Weber, (1986). *The City*, p. 1271. Weber's economic analysis of the patrician city is found in the section 'The Economic Character of the Ancient and Medieval Patriciate', where he concludes that the patriciate were rentiers rather than entrepreneurs conducting business from an office (p. 1293). The patriciate were early modern finance or venture capitalists who gave loans for ventures. They participated in the risks and the profits, and left the work to others. This early modern activity relegated them, in Weber's eyes, to status holders, rather than rational bourgeois class actors. See also p. 1332 for Weber's summary of his economic analysis of the medieval city.

21 Weber, *The City*, (1986), p. 1272.

22 Weber, *The City*, p. 1301.

23 These city revolutions appeared in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in Milan in 1198, Luca in 1203, Lodi in 1206, Pavia in 1208, Sienna in 1210, Verona in 1227, and Bologna in 1228. As has been pointed out elsewhere when the Medieval cities are included the history of political modernity lengthens from a concern with the eighteenth century with the American and French revolutions functioning as competing paradigms, to a longer historical account that includes not only the renaissance city states but also the Lowlands, especially Holland, and the Swiss cantons. See Collins, R. (1999). *Macrohistory*

In his analysis of these revolutions of the medieval plebeian city, Weber points to certain characteristic features that become constitutive of *politics* in the Castoriadian sense introduced above. In other words, they opened the *political* to experiments in democratic self-institution.

On one level, a type of democratisation occurred that, whilst still corporatistic, extended the representative basis of the guilds from the patriciate to include handicraft workers. According to him, in an analysis that has striking affinities with Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the entire development of the *popolo* was initially oriented towards an organised protection of the interests of the *popolani* before the courts, corporations and agencies of the commune in the face of 'threats, insults and the rule of the cudgel. As a rule the movement was triggered by the often far-reaching denial of legal rights to commoners'.²⁴ Weber points to the formation of the city craft guilds as a new form of association that achieved significant political power that stood against the urban commune. These craft guilds became the significant basis for corporatistic democratisation. For example, no decisions could be taken by the city councils unless guild representatives were present. This representation became either a permanent feature or at least occurred when important matters were to be discussed. Moreover, according to Weber, this democratisation was also defensive in that the city guilds functioned as a bulwark against the judicial activity of the councils.²⁵

However, it was more than defensive democratisation that occurred. Weber emphasises the autocephalous and autonomously constituted associational, political, juridical and administrative features of the city, which are not simply formed in patrician and bourgeois or burgher terms, but are themselves the result of a series of more or less open political revolutions and figurations of power whose outcomes are neither stable nor could be predetermined. The Italian craft guilds or *popolo* were, for Weber, a political and not an economic form, with their own officials, finances and military. In this sense they functioned, as he says as 'a state within a state', or more precisely as '*the first deliberately nonlegitimate and revolutionary political association*'.²⁶

Within the self-institution of politics, explicit power began to circulate and become self-limiting. In terms of the latter, one important aspect of the

Essays in Sociology of the Long Run. Stanford: Stanford University Press. The following part of this current discussion leans on Rundell, 'Democratic Revolutions, Power and *The City*', pp. 87–91.

24 Weber, *The City*, p. 1307.

25 Weber, *The City*, (1986), 1301–1302.

26 Weber, *The City*, p. 1302.

formation of these autonomous medieval urban communities was that annual elections were instituted for officials who held the office for only short periods of time. The highest official of the political commune, termed the *capitano del popolo*, was also an elected paid official, but selected from another city in order to open the circulation of power and enable this official to be independent of local interests. Whilst officially he stood below the *podesta* or travelling magistrate, nonetheless he became an official of the commune, participating in its political and juridical life.²⁷ In addition, explicit power also circulated within the city commune. The *capitano del popolo* 'was assisted by separate bodies composed of representatives from the craft guilds who were elected by the city wards for short terms of office'. These representatives claimed rights to protect, to contest decisions, to address proposals, to legislate, and to participate in the decisions of the *popolo*.²⁸

Hence there were two movements through which *politics* came to be self-instituted. The first consisted of the *popolo* as a form of corporate associationalism, which involved power struggles between the guilds as a necessary condition. As Weber notes, 'the successes of the *popolo* were not achieved without violent and often long-drawn out struggle' with its tactics of inclusions of the urban elite and the so-called 'lower guilds' into the extended corporatistic arrangements, and exclusions of the country nobility, peasantry and urban workers.²⁹ A second movement consisted in the existence of the craft guilds or associations, which were the basis for electoral constituencies or 'parties, and, thus, themselves generated representatives. In other words, the *popolo* became the basis for the self-image of urban citizenry who at times participated in violent political ructions, became peaceful, civilised and cultured. Urban rulership also became increasingly autonomous, that is was instituted outside the orbit of the patrimonial state. Its autonomy was instituted, as indicated above, through elections, including challenges to the franchise, and the introduction to limits on office-holding, taxing autonomy, which also dovetailed with control of markets and trade, especially when these were tied to expansionist policies. Moreover, through the combination of these movements autonomous legal and administrative magistracy developed, which became one of the identifying markers of every medieval city commune in Northern and Western Europe, notwithstanding, as Weber remarks, the parallel development of the

27 Weber, *The City*, (1986), p. 1303.

28 Weber, *The City*, pp. 1302–1303.

29 Weber, *The City*, p. 1306.

patrimonial bureaucratic state, which eventually supplanted and subsumed the political dimension of the city.³⁰

In the end, for Weber, closed forms of *the political* won out, and these were instituted from an unexpected quarter—from within, notwithstanding a parallel history of the bureaucratic state. In his analysis of plebeian democracy Weber alerts us to the ability of political tyranny ‘to turn both the limits and the achievements of [] democracy to [its] advantage’.³¹ His analysis of tyranny suggests that it is not a reversion to a pre-modern type of the political. It has its own particular modern hue, which is distinct from its pre-modern form. It is a one-sided appropriation of the mobilisation of the category of urban, republican citizenship as rulership, which at the same time introduces an equally revolutionary innovation—the secular personalisation of *explicit power*.

In this context and according to Weber’s account, *politics* became subject to the dictates of a closure determined by a form of *the political* that began as a series of compromises between, and in the full light of day of its participants. Tyranny in the Italian Renaissance period often began with the election of the *capitano* for longer periods, including for life, and was the outcome of the power struggles between competing guilds or ‘parties’. The tyrannical form of the political, which meant that politics disappeared, increased the range of legal or juridical power, both of which were initially narrow and limited in terms of their scope and legality. In this context, the city’s constitution could be used as a frame or outer shell that gave legitimacy to the tyrant. Weber points to two conditions that fostered the formation of modern tyranny. The first condition was internal: the party in power feared a conspiratorial drive for power by the party that was out of power. The party in power thus acted in a way that closed off the circulation of power between competing or rival groups. The second condition was fear of external threats. This gave an increasing significance and central role to the tyrant as the military commander of the city commune. The net result of these fears stopped the circulation of democratic power and increased the range of illegitimate legal power, since the city became, as Weber remarks, voluntarily subjected to the command of the tyrant.³²

In addition, the closed oligarchic Venetian world also created its own version of modern tyranny, the political court. As indicated above, the political court was tyrannous towards those within the closed world of the political, but

30 Weber, *The City*, (1986), pp. 1323–1328.

31 Arnason, Johann P. (1992). Peter Beilharz, P., Robinson, G., and Rundell, J. (Eds.). ‘The Theory of Modernity and the Problematic of Democracy’ in *Between Totalitarianism and Postmodernity*. p. 51, Mass: The MIT Press.

32 Weber, *The City*, (1986). pp. 1315–1322.

popular with those outside it, as it acted as a court of appeal—a court of judgments. The institution of the *podesta* or travelling magistracy created during this period, which was the bearer of rational law inherited from the Romans, and with trained officials, was another such court. Yet it was absent in Venice because Venice had successfully closed itself to outsiders.³³ This double-sided feature of tyranny was to re-appear in the heteronomous world of the party-system in its totalitarian form in our own contemporary modernity.

For Weber, though, one of the major problems with politics is its indeterminacy and this also gives it a certain fragility. The 'problem' with democracy as far as Weber is concerned is that it is a value rational form that cannot be fully rationalised.³⁴ As his analysis indicates it always has a pragmatic and informal dimension that is revolutionary, that is, contingent, and yet is also built up by convention over the years.³⁵ Its dangers are instructive for Weber in another way. It is not a tragic regime, but an immature one. By the end of *The City*, Weber's narrative concerning the rationalisation of purposive rationality asserts itself. Thus, it is neither capitalistic entrepreneurialism nor the patrimonial state that is the bearer of maturity, of modernity, but Rome and by extension a post-Bismarckian parliamentary system of the political peopled by vocational politicians.³⁶ For Weber, as his other writings suggest, *the politics*

33 Weber, *The City*, pp. 1273–1276.

34 And this meant that, in Weber's eyes, it could not protect itself, its citizenry or its society against dangers and tyrannies, and the ones that mattered most for Weber were the tyranny of irrational politics that emerged from the pluralisation of gods and demons, and the tyranny of the *capitano*. Weber's suspicion towards democracy, which is evident throughout his analysis of the medieval city as well as his remarks on its form in Greek antiquity, entails that there is a reluctance to extend his rationalisation thesis in the direction of the self-institution of autonomy.

35 Weber, *The City*, (1986), p. 1314.

36 See 'Politics as a Vocation' in *From Max Weber*, and 'Parliament and Government in a Reconstructed Germany' in *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2. (1978). For Weber, 'Rome' represents the invention of formal-legal principles of jurisprudence. As his remarks on the Roman Tribunate and the rational-legal legitimacy given to it indicate, the problem with democracy is that it is not conducive to purposive rationalisation. In one of his most telling and important comments, Weber states: [In] Roman political life the rhetoric and give-and-take of the *agora* and *ekklesia* played as little role as the competitions of the *gymnasium*... Tradition and experience of the Elders, the former officeholders above all, determined politics. Old age, rather than youth, set the tone of social forms and the character of dignity. Rational deliberations, rather than the rhetorically stirred lust for booty of the demos or the emotional excitement of the young warriors, tipped the balance in Roman politics. Rome remained under the direction of the experience, the deliberation and the feudal power of the *honoratiores*' (p. 1368). In Weber's historiographical

of modernity should be subsumed to a logic of increasing procedural and purposive rationality, and co-joined with two other modern images of juridical power and cognitive mastery. For him, it protects us against the tyrannies of the new *capitanos* and their wish to revolutionise the state from above at the expense of the plurality of modernity itself and the plurality and participation of its actors, irrespective of the form that the participation takes. He has a point.

On Plato's Statesman: Castoriadis, Reflexive Closure and the Challenge to Politics

If Weber notices that the exercise of explicit power by the guilds in the Renaissance cities introduces closure as a matter of course into the way of doing *political* business, then what does Castoriadis notice about Plato's assessment of and recommendation for, the Athenian polis? The question that I will pursue is not how Castoriadis responds (or may not have responded) to Weber's highly critical analysis of Greek antiquity and its political forms, especially that of *politics*, but rather what he also notices about Greek politics that has deep affinities with Weber's analysis of the Renaissance city states.³⁷ In addition Castoriadis listens to Plato's dialogues with the acute hearing of someone who not only has to, but also *wants* to listen—to dialogues that appear to be straightforward in their syllogisms, have their insights and 'nuggets', but are tricky, have their traps, interstices and openings for creative interpretation and critique.³⁸ And it is to these traps, interstices, and openings that we will be listening for with Castoriadis.³⁹

reconstruction, the democratic revolution of the medieval city is short-lived, and cannot push toward the present, even as a model. The republican city in both its Medieval and Ancient Greek forms is too unstable to be taken as a model for the creation and institutionalisation of politics in a post-patrimonial, that is, fully modern context. 'Rome' is a better bet for Weber as a paradigm for the politics of modernity.

37 Castoriadis makes many critical remarks about Weber's analysis of the political forms of Greek antiquity. See for example 'Individual, Society, Rationality, History'. In *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, pp. 47–80. (1991).

38 As will be discussed in detail below Castoriadis admires Plato's creativity as well as critiques his philosophical style and invention of reflexive heteronomy. For example, see Ames Curtis, D. (Ed. and Trans), (2002), of *On Plato's Statesman*, pp. 3, 7, 53–54. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

39 This is what makes his *On Plato's Statesman* such an instructive text, and one that one wants to spend time with again and again.

However, Castoriadis will come to different conclusions to Weber. If, for Weber, 'autonomy' means a history of *politics* that is lost, not because it is a treasure, but because it borders on immaturity, like the Greek version, then for Castoriadis autonomy means quite the opposite—maturity.⁴⁰ It is a maturity that is indeterminately self-created, yet defeated by the weight of a counter-tradition of ontological determination that is given political voice in Plato's work. His dialogue *The Statesman* is more than a representative text for Castoriadis. Plato's *Statesman* not so much offers, but *creates* arguments against in-determination, against autonomous creation. In this sense, too, *On Plato's Statesman* is also the summation of Castoriadis's long-standing engagement with the Greek tradition.

Let's begin our discussion of Castoriadis's *On Plato's Statesman* by extending the remarks made above on Castoriadis's notion of politics or autonomy, which as is well known, he contrasts with closure and heteronomy. Castoriadis makes a fundamental ontological claim: 'society is a form of self-creation'. Nonetheless, he argues that the type of creation through which societies are instituted, historically speaking, is usually heteronomous, that is closing, intransparent and divorced from itself. 'In heteronomous societies . . . we find institutionally established and sanctioned, the representation of a source of the instituting of society which can only be found outside of this society: among the gods, in God, among the ancestors, in the laws of Nature, in the laws of Reason, in the laws of History'.⁴¹

40 There are two aspects of Kant's work that haunts the works of these two writers—one concerned with the technicalities and formulations of pure reason, which as far as both Weber and Castoriadis are concerned finds its way into the modern technical-industrial imaginary with its scientism. There is also the other aspect of Kant's work concerned with practical reason where the notions of autonomy and freedom are central. In 'What is Enlightenment' Kant opens his discussion of the notions of freedom and autonomy as a release from self-incurred immaturity. Maturity means for Kant the free use of practical reason. Castoriadis leans on this idea of maturity, if not explicitly. For him it means critico-reflexive self-instituting autonomy, whilst arguing against the Kantian program of reason and its transcendental grounding. See Kant, I. (2009). 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' in *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* Nisbet, H.B. (Trans). London: Penguin, pp. 1–11, and Castoriadis, C. (1991). 'The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy' in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*.

41 Castoriadis, C. (1991). 'The Nature and Value of Equality, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 133. This part of the discussion 'leans' on my (1989). 'From the Shores of Reason to the Horizon of Meaning: Some Remarks on Habermas' and Castoriadis' Theories of Culture'. *Thesis Eleven*, 22, especially pp. 15–16.

Alternatively, by autonomy, Castoriadis means the capacity of a social membership to create their own law. Or, more accurately, it is better to refer to this autonomy as second order reflexive autonomy in order to distinguish it from an under-appreciated 'liberal democracy' and, more importantly, his primary ontological claim of the work of human magmatic imaginary creation, or first-order autonomy. Like Arendt, Castoriadis argues that autonomous society, philosophy and politics emerge together. They are inseparable. He argues that 'whenever there is a breakdown of instituted heteronomy the autonomous individual and the autonomous collectivity appear simultaneously. More precisely the political idea and the political question of the autonomy of the individual and the collectivity appear'.⁴² For him, this manifests itself by the coming together of persons as free political actors to participate in the various sources of explicit power. Once this occurs, societies become essentially open, they are instituted by the social actors themselves, who become critically and publically orientated and situated, and make politics. In this context, the questions: 'What is law?' 'What is justice?' 'What is politics?' always remain open, and it is this that also creates transparency. There is always 'the socially real possibility of questioning the law and its foundations'.⁴³

This making and opening of politics is part of the dimension of what Castoriadis calls (second-order) autonomous self-creation. For Castoriadis, second-order reflexive autonomy is an invention of the Greeks, and it is an idea that is rediscovered or reinvented during the course of the Renaissance cities and especially during the American and French revolutions. It can be summed up in the following remark: 'To participate in the management of an intangible state of things, to be autonomous, means to give oneself one's own law, i.e. common laws, both formal and informal, of institutions. Participation in power is participation in instituting power belonging equally with others to an explicitly self-instituting collectivity. Liberty in an autonomous society is expressed in two fundamental laws: no implementation without egalitarian participation in decision-making . . . An autonomous collectivity has as its own motto: we are those whose law is to give ourselves our own law . . . At the same time this implies an education in the deepest sense, a *paideia* forming individuals who have the real possibility to think for themselves'.⁴⁴

Castoriadis's claim for second-order autonomy, though, is more than simply a political claim. It is a thesis that rests on his reconceptualisation of a philosophical anthropology that works with the idea of ontological self-creation

42 Cornelius Castoriadis, (1980), 'Socialism and Autonomous Society', *Telos*, No. 43, p. 93.

43 Castoriadis, 'Socialism and Autonomous Society', p. 104. (1992).

44 Castoriadis, 'Socialism and Autonomous Society', pp. 97–98.

and through his double formulations of magma and social imaginary significations. But let's concentrate, in this essay at least, on the political claim and what arguments were raised against it by the weighty counter-tradition of determinacy.⁴⁵

Let's notice as Castoriadis does, how reflexivity, self-institution and the transparent circulation of explicit power are challenged by another model that is asserted and articulated by Plato.⁴⁶ There are many aspects of Plato's thinking in this particular dialogue that Castoriadis notices and listens to: his coolness towards Athens;⁴⁷ the date and historical context of *The Statesman*;⁴⁸ the movement of his philosophical thought as well as its developmental sequence;⁴⁹ the 'quirkiness' of *The Statesman*;⁵⁰ of two (incorrect) definitions of the

45 See Castoriadis, C. (1987). Blamey, K. (Trans). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press. For discussions of Castoriadis's ontological project see Rundell, J. "From the shores of Reason to the Horizon of Meaning"; Jeff Klooger, *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy*, 2009, Leiden, Brill; Suzi Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation*, 2011, Fordham University Press; Fabio Ciaramelli, 'The Circle of the Origin', in *Reinterpreting the Political*, pp. 127–140.

46 Given the aim of this current essay, Castoriadis, rather than Plato, will be our guide for *The Statesman*. According to Castoriadis the real tetralogy of the later phase in which *The Statesman* is located in Plato's oeuvre should have been *The Philosopher* (not written), *The Statesman*, *The Sophist*, and *The Demagogue* (not written), instead of the more conventionally arranged *Theaetatus*, *The Sophist*, *The Statesman*, and *The Philosopher* (see p. 14). Castoriadis, though, proposes his own phases of Plato's works of which there are four. The fourth one indicates the full fecundity of Plato's thinking in which the aporias and the mixed show themselves fully. This fourth phase, according to Castoriadis, consists of *The Cratylus*, *The Theaetatus*, *The Parmenides*, whose aporetic results flow into *The Sophist*, *The Statesman*, *The Timaeus*, *The Critas*, *The Philebus* and *The Laws* (p. 18). See also the 'Forward: Castoriadis and *The statesman*' by Pierre Vidal-Naquet; 'Introduction: Living thought at Work' by Pacal Vernay; 'On the Translation' and Translators Afterword' all in *On Plato's Statesman*. The edition of Plato's *Statesman* that was used in preparation for this essay was *Plato The Collected dialogues including The Letters*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, with Introduction and Prefatory Notes, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 1018–1085. This particular translation of *The Statesman* is by J.B. Skemp. To be sure, Castoriadis reads Plato's work in the context of his ontological investigations in his 1974 *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, and 'Time and Creation', the publication of which post-dates these seminars. See also Yorgos Oikonomou, (Sept. 2005) 'Plato and Castoriadis: the concealment and the unravelling of democracy', *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 1–15.

47 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 4. (2002).

48 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, pp. 11–14.

49 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, pp. 8–19.

50 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 21.

statesman (the pastor and the weaver), three digressions and eight incidental points. For Castoriadis Plato's *Sophist* and *The Statesman* represent creative work at its best, 'where new points of view are put in place'.⁵¹ The aporias in the works are real and there is a preoccupation with 'the mixed and no longer pure ideas'.⁵² In other words, what interests and intrigues Castoriadis 'is the content and the developmental process of Platonic thought in all of its complexity'.⁵³ There is more to Plato, especially this part of his *oeuvre*, than his coldness towards democracy, his invention of the royal-man and his metaphysics. In Castoriadis' view we witness a second creation of philosophy as constant 'interrogativity', 'the constant re-opening of the question, the fact that in a sense, constantly, the result matters less than the path that allowed one to get there. Once posed, the question brings up another question, which touches off a third one, and so on'.⁵⁴ In this sense we witness, as we have with Weber's *The City*, the full range of Plato's creative imaginary at work in *The Statesman* where he labours with and against the constraints that he has incorporated, and where the digressions, detours and irresolvable paradoxes in the text are as important as the formal structure of the work.⁵⁵

In other words, Castoriadis observes that, in this dimension of Plato's thought, that there is no statement, no place where one can lie down and rest. As Castoriadis states, 'the difference between the pre-Socratics and Plato—Socrates himself being an enigma—is that for the pre-Socratics there are statements upon which one can set or rest the truth. Now for Plato, there are and there are not'.⁵⁶ He introduces into philosophy an endless movement, the co-existence of opposites, elements and a complexion that inspires and propels

51 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 16.

52 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 16.

53 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*. (2002). p. 14. Whilst Castoriadis had an increasing impatience towards Marx's work as well as Freud's, this study of Plato's *Statesman* is filled with perspicacity, wisdom, wit and the fine work of a master butcher—his self-description following Plato—as he carves up the text. See p. 29.

54 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 49.

55 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 167. Castoriadis makes an illuminating reference to music as a possible paradigm for the 'work' of the radical imaginary, rather than dreams, as such, notwithstanding his reference to the latter. 'I believe that we something that is analogous to what might be called the latent content that is at the start of all music, which perhaps initially includes only a rhythm and an intensity coupled with another latent content that is melodic, all of that being subject from the outset to a first-order secondary elaboration [], that of expression; then, next, to a second-order secondary elaboration, that of genuine fixation, that is to say, of formulation or composition' (p. 168).

56 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 50.

questions. And these questions are aimed at fundamental philosophical problems concerning being and the creation of philosophical reasoning. 'It's a kind of reasoning that asks itself whether it's right to posit such and such premises'.⁵⁷ Plato, in his second creation of philosophy and his commitment to 'interrogativity', and in answer to the Eleatic School and Zeno in particular, will say 'no' to fixity, to the one, to the absolute, to immobility, to non-movement and to non-alteration.⁵⁸

In amongst Castoriadis's enthusiasm and critical dissection of Plato's text, there are three aspects of note that we will concentrate on in order to highlight his own concerns regarding the fate of *politics* and the parallel articulation of fixity in Plato's work. These aspects are what he reconstructs as Plato's three digressions. The first digression concerns Plato's arguments against indeterminacy and the re-invention of history *qua* determinacy, that is, Plato's mythic story about the reign of Cronus. The second digression that Castoriadis concentrates on or reconstructs concerns the forms of regimes of the political and their evaluation, whilst the third digression—for Castoriadis the central one—concerns the idea that science alone defines the royal man.⁵⁹

Together these digressions constitute Plato's thought experiments on rulership that are grounded on a metaphysics of the *political*, the result of which is the creation of a counter-model of highly sophisticated heteronomy—what will be termed reflexive heteronomy—that takes its form as the imposition 'to rule over' that became the basis for the invention of 'royal' sovereignty from antiquity to Absolutism to the nation state. As Castoriadis notes, 'One cannot call Plato *totalitarian* or make him into the father of totalitarianism. But on account of his hatred of democracy and on account of what constantly shines through him as a desire to fix the things in the city into place, to put a halt to the evolution of history, to stop self-institution, to suppress self-institution—on this account, Plato obviously becomes in a certain way, the inspirer of the arsenal of everything in history that will represent this attitude'.⁶⁰

57 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 52, (2002).

58 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 54.

59 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 104, see also 24–25.

60 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 5. As Castoriadis himself notes, this is a little too blunt an assessment of Plato's philosophy. For as Plato himself states in *The Statesman* via the Eleatic Stranger, 'Tendence by human herds by violent control is the tyrant's art; tendence freely accepted by herds of free bipeds we call statesmanship. Shall we now declare that he who possesses this latter art and practices this tendence is a true king and a true statesman?' (*The Statesman* 276d, p. 1042). We along with Castoriadis, need to understand what this statesman does.

Let's follow Castoriadis a little closer here, especially beginning with his analysis of Plato's introduction of the myth of Cronus at a crucial moment in the text.

For Castoriadis, Plato's creativity shows its full force in drawing on and reworking three legends—the myth concerning Atreus and Thyestes in which the angered Zeus reverses the course of the sun, and events begin to turn backwards; the myth of Cronus, which is a 'golden-age' one; a third that states that human beings sprouted from the ground and not produced through sexual intercourse. As he says, 'we must first of all see the extraordinary combination [] of the audacity of Plato's imagination in the poetic sense and the geometrical rigour with which, once certain postulates are made, he unfolds his story'.⁶¹ Plato introduces a negative anthropology in the wake of political and philosophical experiments and innovations. As Castoriadis notes elsewhere, these experiments and innovations occur throughout the entirety of Athenian society. 'The spirit of the democracy is to be sought, and to be found, in the tragic poets, in the historians, in Herodotus in the discussion between the three Persian satraps on the three regimes, in Thucydides (and not only in Pericles' *Oration*), and obviously and especially, and above all in the institutions and practices of the democracy'.⁶² According to Castoriadis, it also altered the sense of time from the continuous and the 'traditional' to the changefulness, and the latter was identified with the sense of self-instituting. '[At] Athens, one can see in the sixth, the fifth, and the fourth centuries, change took place between generations, or even within generations . . . This is not an 'individual' phenomenon: the form of tragedy changes, architectural style changes, people change, institutions change'.⁶³ Castoriadis's recognition of self-instituting

61 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 96. For the myth of Cronus in the *Statesman* see 268b–277a, pp. 1033–1042 in *Plato The Collected Dialogues*. For Plato, the herdsman or shepherd simply won't do as a definition of rulership and nurture of humans. It doesn't provide for the 'specific art of nurture of human beings, and if there were, there would be many more directly involved in its exercise that any ruler is . . . But if it is a question of an art of 'responsible charge' of a whole community, what art has a better or prior claim than statesmanship to fulfil this function? What other art can claim to be the art of bearing sovereign rule, the art which bears sovereign rule over men? (276b, pp. 1041–42). Plato subsequently turns his attention to addressing these questions.

62 Castoriadis, C. (1996). 'The Athenian Democracy True and False Questions', in Pierre Lévêque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Cleisthenes the Athenian: An essay on the Representation of Space and Time in Greek Political Thought from the End of the Sixth Century to the Death of Plato*, translated from the French and edited by David Ames Curtis, New York: Humanities Press, p. 125.

63 See also Castoriadis, *The Athenian Democracy*, p. 126. On the political innovations see the following works by M.I. Finley *Politics in the Ancient World*, *The World of Odysseus*,

change, of altering temporal horizons as well as politics, all indicate maturity, as does the capacity for reflexivity about its excesses, limits and hubris.

For Plato, all of this is rank immaturity. Plato's negative anthropology takes the following course in a move or jump he makes to the myth of Cronus. The myth of Cronus stands between his discussion of the statesman as herdsman and pastor to the statesman as weaver. According to Castoriadis, this jump or 'pleasant story to relieve the strain' (Plato) is explained not as a point of connection between the herdsman and the weaver, but as a point of re-orientation.⁶⁴ In Castoriadis's terms the myth of Cronus is the creation by Plato of a new social imaginary of reflexive heteronomy that releases human beings from the recognition of their self-created autonomy and their self-incurred tutelage through the invention of a philosophy of history. Plato's aim is to challenge the Greek Enlightenment view that emphasised the human creation of its worlds of cities, *poleis*, politics, philosophy, the arts, and even the art of war. None of these were divine gifts. In Castoriadis's view, Plato introduces the myth because 'he wants to destroy fifth century thought, destroy Democritus' anthropogony . . . so far as to introduce the idea that what is there during this period of corruption [the Greek Enlightenment] that makes it possible for us to survive is not a human creation but a divine donation'.⁶⁵

The key issue for Castoriadis is Plato's introduction of the ideas of disorder, decay and corruption. The Greek Enlightenment for Plato is a space, a gap, and the crucial question for him is: 'Did the nurslings of Cronus make a right use of their time? . . . When [the whole order of things] must travel without God,

Democracy Ancient and Modern. See also Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Introduction", Kurt A. Raaflaub and Robert W. Wallace "People's Power" and the Egalitarian Trends in Archaic Greece', Robert W. Wallace, 'Revolutions and a New Order in Solonian Athens', Kurt A. Raaflaub, 'The Breakthrough of *Demokratia* in Mid-Fifth Century Athens', Cynthia Farrar, 'Power to the People', all in Kurt A. Raaflaub, Josiah Ober, and Robert W. Wallace, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece*; Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles and Ideology*; Cynthia Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking: The Invention of Politics in Classical Athens*; Pierre Lévêque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Cleisthenes the Athenian: An Essay on the Representation of Space and Time in Greek Political Thought from the End of the Sixth Century to the Death of Plato*; Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and tragedy in Ancient Greece*; Michael Scott, *From Democrats to Kings The Downfall of Athens to the Epic Rise of Alexander the Great*.

64 Castoriadis states that he would 'like to maintain that this first definition of the statesman as shepherd is in fact proposed by Plato only in order to be able to tell the story of the reign of Cronus . . . it's the first definition that is introduced in order that Plato might be able to bring up the myth, in order that there might be something onto which to hang the myth' (*On Plato's Statesman*: p. 101).

65 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 102.

things go well enough in the years immediately after he abandons control, but as time goes on and forgetfulness of God arises in it, the ancient condition of chaos also begins to assert its sway. At last, as this cosmic era draws to its close, this disorder comes to a head. The few good things it produces it corrupts with so gross a taint of evil that hovers at the very brink of destruction, both of itself and the creatures in it.⁶⁶

This period, according to Plato will only lead to immaturity or worse. Left alone to its own devices, the world including the human one will be reduced to chaotic barbarism. Plato's new anthropogony and his cultural pessimism are introduced at this point. Humanity is a disaster. To fix this, to move to a new maturity, disorder must be reversed into order, and the only way that this can be achieved is by standing or stepping outside the *conventional* yet disastrous forward moving cycle of time and invoking another one that stands apart and is independent of it. Positing a reversal of time is not only Plato's fictional device; it is also according to Castoriadis, 'a move to transcendence that he had already established in *The Timaeus*. Only true time is the time directed by God, and this time must run in reverse. 'The god is obliged to take back the helm, resume his post as helmsman, and set things right again' . . . By intervening, Chronus saves the real, effectively actual existence of the world. He saves universality of being . . .'⁶⁷ And so, as Castoriadis notices, humanity is released from its own responsibility into the responsibility of a god, into a new theodicy, an anthropogonic, cosmological heteronomy.

Thus, for Castoriadis, Plato's goal of introducing the myth of Cronus at this particular point of the text is to introduce 'what could be called *strategic reserves* at the level of philosophy, at the level of ontology, at the level of cosmology'.⁶⁸ In the right and proper time of Cronus human beings were led by divine shepherds, and, and not by one another. In other words, Plato introduces a philosophy of history in the form of a cosmological argument to take us back to *the political* and away from *politics*.

However, as Plato has already established, if it is a shepherd who is going to lead and tend to a human flock, then who might this new sovereign be? Here, Plato returns from the cosmological level to posit a this-worldly sovereign ruler who will take over the reins, so to speak, from the (re)public of citizens, who in Plato's view have made such a mess of things. Rather, and by using the myth, *governing* rather than *politics* falls not to anyone. 'Making laws is a royal job'. Against the political and cultural inclinations of the Greeks, including

66 Plato, *The Statesman*, 272c–273c–d, pp. 1037–1039.

67 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, pp. 111–112.

68 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 114.

the Spartans, so Castoriadis argues, Plato introduces a second digression, the notion of royal sovereignty into the lexicon of Greek thought in the context of a discussion of three possible models of rulership—oligarchy, democracy, and monarchy, with the latter being viewed by the Greeks at the time as ‘barbarian’ and Persian, rather than tyrannous, as with the rulers of Sicily. As Castoriadis notes, ‘the vacillations of *The Statesman* can be understood if they are placed within the evolution of Plato’s thought, which begins with *The Gorgias*, when Socrates says to Callicles, who is presented as a politician: it isn’t you who are the true statesman, it me {521d}. The true statesman is the philosopher, he who knows how to tell the definition of the just and the unjust. From there one goes to *The Republic*, with the philosopher who governs. Then *The Statesman* gives us this definition of the royal man . . . And finally we touch down in the city of *The Laws*, where the government is almost democratic—are aristocratic in Aristotle’s sense, since the magistrates are elected and not drawn by lot—but in which at the same time, there’s this nocturnal council’.⁶⁹

Yet, it is more than this, though, for Plato. Rulership proper—which he now equates with royal sovereignty as its ideal—requires correct knowledge, if it is not to be brute force or tyranny.⁷⁰ And, for Castoriadis and for Plato, this is the key point and the topic of Castoriadis’ discussion of the third digression in *The Statesman*. For Plato, and in the wake of the myth of Cronus, the problem with *politics* is that it is a chaotic activity in which arguments are made, votes taken and decisions made—again and again, all of which can be revisited and reversed. And this activity occurs by all who are citizens, and requires no specialised knowledge or science of politics. It is pragmatic; it also requires *phronesis* or creative judgement in that it is reflexive and involves a learning process of trial and error (albeit not an evolutionary one). As Castoriadis notes in his observation concerning democratic practice or the practice of making

69 On Plato’s *Statesman*, p. 158; see also pp. 119–121; 127–128. See Plato, *The Gorgias*, 521d; *The Republic*, especially Book VI, 488b–d for the philosopher king, and Book 8 for Plato’s dialogue regarding the five forms of government—aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny; *The Statesman*, 291d–e and 300d–303b, where at 302d he describes seven—kingly rule and tyranny (the rule of one), aristocracy and oligarchy (the rule of few), and direct democracy and constitutional or law bound democracy (the rules of the many). The seventh is a rule by the statesman who possesses the art or science of governing (305e) that oversees all other arts and activities, can ‘weave’ them together. His notion of *ēpistēmē* overlays Plato’s notion of the statesman as weaver. See also *The Laws*, especially Book 12 at 960b–e, 961c, and 969b–c for his dialogues concerning the nocturnal council, which if we draw on Weber’s analysis of Venice as well, is rule by a closed council using executive power. These are in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*.

70 Plato, *The Statesman*, 291e–299.

political autonomy: '(1) the crowd is capable of distinguishing bad advice from good advice; and (2) that, after trials and errors and a number of experiences, it is capable of learning'.⁷¹ For Plato, though, only an art or science of government (and not even a vocation—in the spirit of Weber) will save us, bring us back to maturity. As Plato remarks through the voice of The Stranger: 'I think it follows that if the art of government is to be found in this world at all in its pure form, it will be found in the possession of one or two, or at most, of a select few . . . On this principle it is the men who possess the art of ruling and these only, whom we are to regard as rulers, whatever their constitutional form their rule may take . . . Then the constitution par excellence, the only constitution worthy of the name, must be one in which the rulers are not men making a show of political cleverness but men possessed of scientific understanding of the art of government'.⁷²

As Castoriadis remarks this 'art', science or *ēpisteme* of government is the ability to have the knowledge of the totality, the art of entering into the action at the right moment, under the right condition. As such, and more importantly, it is the ability to order, and hence control, the forms of knowledge to make a totality.⁷³ And yet, as again Castoriadis notes, 'the *ēpisteme* is practically inaccessible to those who are human'.⁷⁴ Ultimately it belongs to the realm of Ideas and so Plato constitutes a 'gap' between the Ideal or the essences and concrete reality with all of its flaws (or in the language of *The Statesman* its illnesses and maladies for which a doctor is required).⁷⁵ In Plato's view the law, and especially the law instituted by the polis cannot fill the gap between universality and the concrete—only the royal man can.

All of the other models of the *political* are imitations of this basic metaphysical 'fact', for Plato. In other words, the distinction that he makes between the Ideal and the real or concrete anchors the text in terms of its metaphysics and not only in terms of its science of government. For Plato, as Castoriadis goes to great length to point out, the law, because it is an imitation, can only attempt

71 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 140.

72 Plato, *The Statesman*, 293b–d, p. 1062.

73 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 144, see also pp. 121–124, 130.

74 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 155.

75 Plato keeps the important distinction between *ēpisteme* and *technai*. *Episteme* is the art of knowing everything, of making, ordering and controlling knowledge into a totality. *Technai*, on the other hand, is the 'how to' of a specific task and the skills that are required to fulfil this task. *Phronesis* is neither. It is that which is neither truly or really codifiable. Castoriadis also 'leans' on these distinctions in his own formulations of *legein* and *teukhein* in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, with the added dimension of the constituting work of the radical imaginary.

to fix on paper, to write down, the multiple acts and decisions that constitute the activity of *politics* (or really the *political*). It is an alienation of the spoken word.⁷⁶

The statesman, thus, functions in the same way as the divine shepherd does in the myth of Cronus. In other words, Plato absolutises the gap between divine time and human time, on the one hand, and the one between the universal and the concrete (as part of the same system) on the other, and in terms of the latter fills it with the statesman who is also law and judge. Because Plato absolutises the gap with the statesman as the 'fill-in', so to speak, so can he also absolutise or 'fix' the notions of the universal and the concrete. But, for Castoriadis there is a movement on both sides, which affects how the gap, itself, is viewed: 'But it's precisely in the twofold existence of a rule and a certain gap in relation to this rule that what we can have as autonomy qua social beings is established. It's a gap, first of all, because the rule not being able to cover all the cases obliges us to find our way in concrete situations, not only legally immaterial ones but even legally pertinent, important ones, in which nothing is prescribed. And it's a gap, in the second place, precisely because, the rule never being able to be adapted to reality, we are called upon from time to time to call it into question.'⁷⁷

Yet, for Plato, this activity can only be undertaken by the one, not the many. This makes the royal man an exceptional man, whose qualities (Weber would say charisma) has to be accepted by everyone, by the city. As Castoriadis caustically remarks, 'And here Plato has just said: No matter whether the statesman governs with or without *nomos*, with or without consent, as long as he has *ēpistēmē* . . . it's outrageous.'⁷⁸

For Castoriadis, like Weber in his own discussion of the invention of modern tyranny but from a different direction, the implications are immediate. This is the invention of the absolutisation of *the political*, which is legitimated by the

76 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, pp. 121–122, and 162 where he states in his critical remarks concerning the distinction between speech and writing, or speech and the law: 'There is something that is the living subject, living *logos*, living speech, living dialogue; and this is the genuine 'life of the mind', to employ and anachronistic expression. And then there's the dead deposit of that, which are letters, the *grammata*, artifacts, which the spirit has constituted, in which it has crystallised itself, but from which it has withdrawn. And this latter became one of the great themes of subsequent philosophy, in Hegel and Marx . . . the point of departure for this distinction, between the opposition between the spirit that breathes, that is alive, and dead works, is this passage from the *Statesman*'. See Plato, *The Statesman*, 294b–c, and *Phaedrus*, where this argument is laid, 275a.

77 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 144.

78 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, p. 131.

science of metaphysics. The statesman is exceptional, and by being so can act both within and outside the law for the good of 'the city' and can exercise a claim for the sole right and use of *explicit power*. In fact s/he knows what the good of the city *is*. In a critique of not only *politics* but also formal law and writing because of constitution is a written document, an objectivated argument that is alienated from its original source, Plato can claim, so Castoriadis argues in tacit agreement with Habermas on this point that 'the truth is in the knowledge and the will of the royal man and not in the laws'.⁷⁹

Plato's *Statesman*, for Castoriadis articulates the *germ* of reflexive heteronomy, as against the *germ* of autonomy. To put it bluntly, *On Plato's Statesman* can be read as the companion text to 'The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy', not for its analysis of Greek democracy, but for its analysis of the social-historical creation of reflexive heteronomy, or the closing of politics. It is taken, germinated as the later plants of absolutism, authoritarianism and exceptionalism in a modern political form as the new redeemer, Caesar or *capitano* (for example, the secular Napoleon or the new theocratic leaders), the Party, and even the contemporary law of the excluding exception. As the implications of Castoriadis's study on Plato's *The Statesman* indicates the origin of this notion does not rely on, for example, the universalisation of either a negative anthropology of survival in the manner portrayed by Agamben, or a negative anthropology of the friend/enemy distinction, together with Schmitt's idealisation of Absolutism, but rather from an historical moment that is articulated in a philosophical register that has lasting consequences.⁸⁰

It would be enough, without the development of the modern forms of authoritarianism and exceptionalism, to point to the formal bureaucratic forms so aptly analysed by Weber and his observations concerning oligarchic and corporatistic arrangements. This is irrespective of the positive recommendations that occur for these in the context of political modernity by such writers as Hegel, Durkheim and Mauss in their own attempts to

79 Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, pp. 123; 132/133; 141.

80 Castoriadis's critiques of reflexive heteronomy have revolved around two versions of modernity—the capitalist-bureaucratic one, and the Soviet-style stratocratic one. See, for example, the extracts from *The Castoriadis Reader*, especially 'On the Content of Socialism (1955–1957) Excerpts', and 'The Social Regime in Russia', pp. 40–105, and 218–238, respectively. Both regimes are oligarchic, although the science or will of the statesman belongs more to the social imaginary of soviet-type societies, as Castoriadis portrays them. See also Schmitt, C. (1985). *Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by George Schwab, Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press; Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

re-frame, if not 'the city', but the relation between civil society and the state under the guise of *politics*. For Weber, though, as well as Hegel, Durkheim and Mauss the issue is not so much autonomy with its conflicts and dissonances, but *integration and control*, especially at the level of institutionally constituted mediations between the various sectors of society, whether or not these are formal bureaucratic mediations, or ones constituted through corporatist or representative democracy.

Rather, and as Castoriadis has noted again and again, bureaucratisation, corporatism and oligarchy, under which he also subsumes representative democracy, downplay varieties of conflict. These forms of the political are geared to pre-conceived or background values or imaginary horizons of unity and formal-bureaucratic control in their exercise of explicit power, the result of which is the closing nature of the *political* and the circumscription of *politics*.⁸¹ Both Weber and Castoriadis understand that because *politics* is an indeterminate historical creation it is subject to, challenged by and intersects with other social-historical creations that emphasise both the closed and heteronomous nature of *explicit power* and *the political*. This is the case even if these forms are self-limiting by their own formal or procedural terms of reference, which can change *politics* and even demolish it. This makes *politics* not a tragic regime, nor one subject to historical fixity, but a fragile one.

81 See Hegel, G.W.F. (1979). Knox, T.M. (Trans). *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Durkheim, E. (1992) Brookfield C. (Trans). *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*. Preface by Bryan S. Turner. London: Routledge, and his Second Preface (1933) George Simpson, G. (Trans). to the *Division of Labour in Society*. New York: The Free Press; Mauss, M. (1990). Halls, W.H. (Trans). Douglas, M (Foreward). *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Routledge. See also Michels, R. (1968). Paul, E. & C. (Trans). Lipset, S.M. (Intro). *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York: Free Press, and Premat, C. (2006) 'Castoriadis and the Modern Political Imaginary—Oligarchy, Representation, Democracy', in *Critical Horizons*. 7, pp. 251–276.

Radical Democratic Subjectivity: Possibilities and Limits

Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos

Introduction

Castoriadis' idea of radical democratic subjectivity goes hand in hand with that of the pursuit of the project of an autonomous society understood as 'a movement that does not stop.'¹ This idea in turn draws upon the anonymous collective (the masses, the people), the instituted (the laws and institutions of society) and society's self-instituting power (radical imaginary creativity). For Castoriadis, 'every society exists by instituting the world as its world, or its world as the world.'² Although every society is self-instituting whether or not it recognises itself as such, autonomous society is aware of its power to make its laws and institutions. In this framework Castoriadis highlights the place of reflective subjects as *co-creators of their world*, that is, as capable of questioning the existing social forms and creating new ones. The democratic subject is thus conceived as capable of participating in an autonomous collective that aims to replace the liberal capitalist institutions of domination with a just regime defined by the openness of 'public time' and 'public space.'³

But since everything in Castoriadis's conceptual framework is ultimately positioned in relation to the mediating role of the instituting power of radical democratic subjects, the collective of individuals who reflectively engage in instituting takes priority over whatever is created. At the same time, their instituting practice privileges the activities of questioning over creating. Moreover, giving primacy to the power of instituting in this way reduces the already instituted society to *that which can be destroyed* and the anonymous

* We would like to thank Vrasidas Karalis and the reviewer of this chapter for their helpful comments.

1 Castoriadis, C. (1997b), *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination*, p. 5. California: Stanford University Press.

2 Castoriadis, C. (1987), *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 186 Cambridge: Polity Press.

3 Castoriadis, C. (1996), 'The Greek Πόλις and the Creation of Democracy'. In Lily, R. (Ed.). *The ancients and the moderns*, p. 49. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

collective to *that which can be given new form*. In sum, we hope to show that radical democratic subjects can at best create the nothingness of institutions out of the emptiness of the anonymous collective. This argument forms part of a larger research agenda in which we investigate the claim that Castoriadis's notions of autonomy and democracy are based on axiomatic decisions that privilege: (1) creating over receiving; (2) instituting over the instituted; and, perhaps most importantly, (3) signification over significance. We also try to show that when Castoriadis invokes the three dimensions of 'social doing',⁴ which address the institutable, the instituted and the instituting power, these constitute a syllogistic schema that: firstly, assigns a mediating role to the instituting power at the expense of the other two terms; and, secondly, overlooks a fourth dimension of social doing, namely the uninstitutable indeterminate gathering that facilitates the perpetual re-enactment of autonomy and justice.⁵

In the present chapter, we will try to show that Castoriadis inadvertently enacts the formal closure of the power of instituting he assigns to the autonomous collective. Consequently, he fails to move beyond the dominant formalism characterising the modern Western world, a condition that Hegel links to the pervasive atomistic ontology of private property ownership. If our analysis is correct, then ultimately Castoriadis's critique of liberal capitalism manifests the protest of a formal subjectivity whose very impotence serves to reinforce capitalist modes of being. Our approach will be to juxtapose Castoriadis's reading of the history of the Greco-Western world in terms of 'the struggle between autonomy and heteronomy'⁶ with an alternative picture that emerges if we follow Hegel in his diagnosis of modernity and, in particular, in his ascription of a decisive formative role to modern Western property-owning subjectivity. Against the background of this Hegelian view, the question arises whether Castoriadis's idea of radical democratic subjectivity inadvertently conforms to the character of the Hegelian 'empty' self that underpins property-owning subjectivity and, hence, to a mode of being that can do no more than protest against its emptiness. For Castoriadis, of course, Hegel's account of history in terms of the unfolding of absolute spirit illustrates the problematic tendency of the inherited tradition to deny the ontology of creation and hence to reinforce the prevalence of heteronomy. On his reading, the heteronomy of inherited thought stems from its reduction of being and temporality

4 Castoriadis, C. (1987), p. 373.

5 We discuss the notion of the indeterminate gathering in the context of its operation in Plato's *Republic* in Nicolacopoulos, T. and Vassilacopoulos, G. (2012b). "The Pulse of Chronos: Historical time, the eternal and timeless in the Platonic gathering", In *Parrhesia*, 15: 54–63.

6 Castoriadis, C. (1996), p. 33.

to determinacy and spatiality. Even Hegel, who is recognised for having 'transformed metaphysics from a spatial to a temporal construction,'⁷ does so, according to Castoriadis, only by reducing the temporal to a variation of the spatial as is the practice of inherited thought.⁸ The inherited tradition has therefore been unable to apprehend the world's 'essential indeterminacy'⁹ and has thus failed to remain grounded in the social-historical. From this perspective, when philosophers like Hegel acknowledge the significance of history, they still 'situate themselves within history only in order to get out of it, they try to have a look at themselves from outside, they believe that they can inspect their own backs.'¹⁰ In this chapter we leave to one side this broader disagreement in order to test Castoriadis's conception of radical democratic subjectivity against the background of the Hegelian account of modernity's conceptual limits. From this Hegelian perspective, Castoriadis's conception appears rather one-sided.

In the first section we will set out Castoriadis's idea of radical democratic subjectivity and discuss its appeal by way of comparison with the dominant 'consumerist conceptions'. We argue that acceptance of Castoriadis's idea depends in part on whether he is able to distinguish *effective* radical democratic subjectivity from what passes as democratic practice in the pseudo-democracies of the West. In the second section we will draw upon Castoriadis's discussion of the difference between autonomous and heteronomous responses to the Chaos of the world to explain how Castoriadis might distinguish radical democratic subjects from pseudo-democrats. In the third section we will draw upon Hegel's account of the development of modern Western subjectivity to argue that Castoriadis's reliance on the will to accept the Chaos fails to distinguish radical democratic subjectivity because the generalised practice of owning that cuts across consumerist and radical democratic activities in capitalist society, also exposes the Chaos of the world. Having concluded that Castoriadis thus fails to demonstrate the possibility of radical democratic practice in the current reality, we then locate the conceptual source of this failure in Castoriadis's way of privileging the power of instituting. In the final two sections we will explain how Castoriadis's conceptual framework gives priority to the power of instituting and show how this inadvertently commits Castoriadis's conception of radical democratic subjectivity to the empty formalism that Hegel describes and which Castoriadis opposes.

7 Heller, A. (2012). "Philosophy as Literary Genre", p. 20. In Thesis eleven, 10(1).

8 Castoriadis, C. (1987), p. 191.

9 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 31.

10 Castoriadis, C. (1984), *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. p. xxi. Sussex: Harvester Press.

Castoriadis and the Idea of Democracy

For Castoriadis, democracy is ‘the regime of explicit and lucid self-institution, as far as is possible, of the social institutions that depend on explicit collective activity’ and whose establishment is essential to the success of the project of an autonomous society.¹¹ As a project that expresses and embodies the project of autonomy, democracy aspires to ‘break[ing] the closure at the collective level.’¹² Although history has demonstrated that an autonomous society is possible, first in the ancient Greek *polis* and then in modern Western Europe, for the most part it has consisted of heteronomous societies defined by the closure of meaning, that is, by a halting of the democratic practice of political questioning.¹³

If the law is God-given, or if there is a philosophical or scientific “grounding” of substantive political truths (with Nature, Reason, or History as ultimate “principle”) then there exists an extra-social standard for society. There is a norm of the norm, a law of the law, a criterion on the basis of which the question of whether a particular law (or state of affairs), is just or unjust, proper or improper, can be discussed and decided. This criterion is given once and for all and, *ex hypothesi*, does not depend upon human action.

Once it is recognized that no such ground exists, either because there is a separation between religion and politics, as is, imperfectly, the case in modern societies, or because, as in Greece, religion is kept strictly at bay by political activities, and once it is also recognized that there is no “science”, no *επιστήμη* or *τέχνη*, of political matters, the question of what a just law is, what justice is—what the “proper” institution of society is—opens up as a genuine, that is, *interminable question*.¹⁴

11 Castoriadis, C. (1997b). “Democracy as procedure and democracy as regime”, pp. 4–5. In *Constellations*, 4(1).

12 Castoriadis, C. (1991). *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in political philosophy*, p. 21. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

13 Castoriadis, C. (1991). p. 20; Castoriadis, C. (1997c). “The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy”. In Curtis, D.A. (Ed.). *The Castoriadis Reader*. pp. 336–337. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

14 Castoriadis, C. (1996), p. 50. (emphasis added).

For Castoriadis then 'a society is autonomous not only if it knows that it makes its laws but also if it is up to the task of putting them into question.'¹⁵ This is the mark of a genuine democracy.

Following the political practice of the Athenians, such a democratic regime must give effect to the universally valid distinction between three spheres of activity. According to Castoriadis,

the overall institution of society must both separate and articulate: the *oikos*, the *agora*, and the *ekkle-sia*. A free translation would be: the private sphere, the private/public sphere, and the (formally and in the strong sense) public sphere, identical to [...] explicit power.¹⁶

Democracy must establish an autonomous sphere of politics in the sense of political activity (*la politique*), as distinct from taking for granted the already instituted framework of the political life of society (*le politique*).¹⁷ A genuine democracy is therefore 'the regime in which the public sphere becomes truly and effectively public—belongs to everyone, is effectively open to the participation of all' in and as 'the *ekkle-sia*', Castoriadis's symbolic term for the public/public sphere, that is, the site of the political or, in other words, explicit power.¹⁸

Here the institution of society must be capable of making democratic procedures function in accordance with their 'spirit' and this in turn calls for the cultivation of democratic subjects. For this,

the institution of society must endow critical thinking as such with positive value—and then the Pandora's box of putting existing institutions into question is opened up and democracy again becomes society's movement of self-institution—that is to say, a new type of regime in the full sense of the term.¹⁹

It follows from the above that radical democratic participation, inalienable access of each individual to society's explicit power, gives rise to the possibility of creating the new as a genuine project for humanity²⁰ precisely because

15 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 87.

16 Castoriadis, C. (1997b), p. 7.

17 Castoriadis, C. (1991), pp. 158–162; Castoriadis, C. (1997b), p. 1.

18 Castoriadis, C. (1997b), pp. 7–8.

19 Castoriadis, C. (1997b), p. 10.

20 Castoriadis, C. (1997b).

‘the origin, the cause, the foundation of society is society itself, as instituting society’²¹ or, in other words, ‘society as such is self-creation.’²² In the present context creation, in the radical sense of ontological creation *ex nihilo*, means ‘the positing of a new *eidos*, a new essence, a new form in the full and strong sense: new determinations, new norms, new laws.’²³ According to Castoriadis, this positing results in society’s self-alteration.²⁴ This is ‘true temporality’ that genuinely allows for the possibility of the emergence of ‘otherness’, the deployment of genuine alterity in accordance with the essential indeterminacy of the world.²⁵ Significantly, Castoriadis defines alterity as the time of ‘creation and destruction’ given that the new always shatters determinacy; it unavoidably ‘alters the total form of what was there before.’²⁶ From this perspective, history, like society, is ‘the emergence of otherness, immanent creation, non-trivial novelty’²⁷

Moreover, ‘the institutions and social imaginary significations of each society are free creations of the anonymous collective concerned.’²⁸

We cannot conceive such creation as the work of the one or of a few individuals who might be designated by name, but only as that of the collective-anonymous imaginary, of the instituting imaginary, to which, in this regard, we shall give the name instituting power.²⁹

For Castoriadis, politics proper, understood as ‘explicit and lucid activity that concerns the instauration of desirable institutions’³⁰ requires the anonymous collective to create by *incessantly* questioning the already instituted and not simply to create the just institutions once and for all. For the anonymous collective then the specific characteristics of just institutions cannot be pre-determined philosophically. For, ‘the question of the common good belongs to

21 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 327.

22 Castoriadis, C. (1997c), p. 333.

23 Castoriadis, C. (1996), p. 31. For an extensive discussion of Castoriadis’s notion of creation *ex nihilo* see Adams, S. (2011). *Castoriadis’s Ontology: Being and Creation*. New York: Fordham.

24 Castoriadis, C. (1997c), p. 333.

25 For an extensive discussion of Castoriadis’s notion of indeterminacy see Klooger, J. (2009). *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy*, Leiden, Boston: Brill.

26 Castoriadis, C. (1987), p. 212; Castoriadis, C. (1997a). pp. 394–395 (emphasis added).

27 Castoriadis, C. (1987), p. 184.

28 Castoriadis, C. (1997c), p. 333.

29 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 84.

30 Castoriadis, C. (1997b), p. 4.

the domain of social-historical making / doing [*faire*] not to theory.³¹ Instead, in the incessant practice of (re)creating the institutions of a just democracy the anonymous collective must be guided by an open-ended criterion.

The laws and institutions of a democratic society give rise to the political imperative “create the institutions that, by being internalized by individuals, most facilitate their accession to their individual autonomy and their effective participation in all forms of explicit power existing in society”.³²

This formulation of the *telos* of both democratic society and radical democratic subjectivity gives determinate shape to the democratic process by linking democratic participation to the radical imaginary power of the collective to create the new. It is the *constituting element* of political autonomy—the definition of autonomy in terms of society’s explicit self-instituting power—that, as Andreas Kalyvas points out, enables a potential re-inscription of the democratic process.³³ At the same time, Castoriadis recognises that ‘the equal effective participation of all in society’s effective power to posit the law presupposes deep intervention in the substantive organisation of social life.’³⁴ Within Castoriadis’s conceptual framework, democracy thus becomes a movement for greater appropriations of the instituting social imaginary ground-power ‘with a view towards transforming the instituted capitalist relations of domination and inequality.’³⁵ To achieve such a transformation is at the very least to institute new ideas of publicness as was the case in the Athenian *polis*. The life of the Athenian *polis* gives rise to the creation of a ‘public space’ to which ‘only the education (*παιδεία*) of the citizens as citizens can give valuable substantive content’ and to ‘the creation of a public time’, meaning ‘the emergence of a dimension where the collectivity can inspect its own past, as the result of its own actions, and where an indeterminate future opens up a domain for its activities.’³⁶

As Kalyvas (1998) argues, by drawing on the idea of the autonomous political creation of institutions that facilitate a shared public ethos of participation,

31 Castoriadis, C. (1997b), p. 15.

32 Castoriadis, C. (1991), p. 173.

33 Kalyvas, A. (1998). ‘The radical instituting power and democratic theory’ *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 24(1): 9–28.

34 Castoriadis, C. (1997b), p. 6.

35 Kalyvas, A. (1998), p. 22.

36 Castoriadis, C. (1996), p. 49.

Castoriadis resists reliance on either an empty formalistic procedure that invokes impartiality and pseudo-neutrality or a pre-given essentialist content informing the democratic process. Castoriadis' idea of radical democracy has thus been praised for its potential to redefine the democratic process in terms that steer clear of the familiar problems associated with contemporary liberal and neo-Kantian proceduralism, on the one hand, and neo-Aristotelian communitarianism, on the other.³⁷

At the same time, however, contemporary critiques of the meaning and ideological uses of the Western concept of democracy have challenged the efficacy of Western ideals of democratic subjectivity in general. For example, in a collection of essays devoted to uncovering the (misplaced) authority of the word 'democracy', Alain Badiou echoes Plato in suggesting that 'the only thing that constitutes the democratic subject is pleasure or, more precisely, pleasure-seeking behaviour.'³⁸ Having been trained in a democracy wherein 'everything is equivalent to everything else', for Badiou the democratic subject of Western capitalist societies

reflects the substitutability of everything for everything else. So we have the overt circulation of desires, of the objects on which these desires fix, and of the cheap thrills they deliver, and it's within this circulation that the subject is constituted.³⁹

In the same work, Wendy Brown challenges democracy's presumption 'that human beings want to be self-legislating' and argues moreover that 'when non-democrats are housed in shells of democracies' this gives rise to the possibility of 'fascism authored by the people.'⁴⁰

On the one side, then, we face the problem of peoples who do not aspire to democratic freedom and, on the other, of democracies we do not want [...] Contouring both possibilities is the problem of peoples oriented towards short-run gratifications [...] and disinclined to sacrifice either their pleasures or their hatreds for collective thriving.⁴¹

37 For a discussion of these problems see Kalyvas, A. (1998).

38 Badiou, A. (2012). 'The democratic emblem.' In Agamben, G. et al., *Democracy in what state?* p. 9. New York: Columbia University Press.

39 Badiou, A. (2012), pp. 10–11.

40 Brown, W. (2012), 'We are all democrats now ...' in Agamben, G. et al. *Democracy in what state?* pp. 54–55, New York: Columbia University Press.

41 Brown, W. (2012), pp. 55–56.

Brown and Badiou voice concerns about what we will refer to as the 'consumerist conceptions' of democratic subjectivity that now dominate in Western liberal societies. Castoriadis is in agreement with much of this critique. He suggests that since, '[p]aradoxically, today's pseudodemocracies in the West have in fact rendered the public sphere in large part private,'⁴² such heteronomous societies misrepresent themselves in claiming to be democracies. He laments today's absence of a passion for public affairs, the deep desire for responsible institution-making that is an essential ingredient for the establishment of a genuine democracy. He also agrees that the political apathy that accounts for the privatisation of the public sphere along with capitalism's reinforcement of consumerism have meant that 'the spirit of the times' favours 'insignificance.'⁴³

Even so, from Castoriadis's perspective observations like those by Brown and Badiou illustrate the effects of the retreat of the political project of autonomy in our times but not the impossibility of autonomy and democracy as such.⁴⁴ Whilst such observations grasp and give expression to the circumstances that embody the closure characterising heteronomous societies, radical democratic subjectivity still has a genuine place in contemporary societies because

even if it [the project of autonomy] finally failed, as in Athens, or if it is in danger of waning, as in the present Western world, the effect has been the creation of a totally new, unheard of ontological *eidos*: a type of being which, consciously and explicitly, alters the laws of its own existence as it is, however partially, materialized in a self-legislating society and in a new type of human being: reflective and deliberating subjectivity. And this is what allows us to take some distance from our own society, to talk about society and history in general, and to accept rational criticism of what we say in this or any other respect.⁴⁵

Even though the masses may or may not know themselves to be creative in this radical way, given the historical emergence of the powers of reflective

42 Castoriadis, C. (1997b), p. 7.

43 Castoriadis, C. (1997b); Castoriadis, C. (2011), Rockhill, G. and Garner, J.V. (Trans.). *Postscript on Insignificance*, p. 6. New York: Continuum.

44 For a discussion of Castoriadis's understanding of the impact of the retreat of the political project of autonomy for his philosophy see Nicolacopoulos, T. and Vassilacopoulos, G. (2012a). "What ought we to think?": Castoriadis' response to the question for thinking.' In *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 8(2): 21–33.

45 Castoriadis, C. (1997c), p. 337.

and deliberating subjectivity, today's modern Western liberal societies have become *partially open* societies. That is, although heteronomous in that they continue to misrepresent their own being as creation and creativity, such societies can still give rise to the emergence of an *autonomous collective* consisting of those who are *reflectively* committed to the project of creating an autonomous radical democratic society. For Castoriadis, such a collective draws upon its power to immerse itself in the present understood as the time of 'bursting, emerging, creating':

The present, the *nun*, is here explosion, split, rupture—the rupture of what is as such. This present exists as originating, as immanent transcendence, as source, as the surging forth of ontological genesis.⁴⁶

In this way, in partially open societies the instituting imaginary that irrupts in and through the creative activity of the anonymous collective, takes shape as a self-aware *autonomous* collective.⁴⁷ It is in this wider conceptual framework that Castoriadis proposes the idea of radical democratic subjectivity as an alternative to the dominant consumerist conceptions. Next we will examine more closely the options available to reflective and deliberating subjects in partially open societies along with Castoriadis's reasons for thinking that radical democratic subjectivity is still a genuine possibility.

Radical Democratic Subjectivity as a Response to the Chaos of the World

Castoriadis discusses two possible paths available to actors, individually and collectively, within partially open heteronomous societies. Either they remain unaware of society's self-instituting power—as in the case of the consumerist pseudo and anti-democrats that Brown and Badiou describe—or else they become explicitly instituting and are thus able to posit themselves as both creators and questioners of the laws they create. But how does one pursue the latter path and what is involved in the claim that the pursuit of the political project of autonomy (the establishment of an explicitly self-instituting just democracy) depends upon the existence of a collective of individuals who

46 Castoriadis, C. (1987), pp. 200–201.

47 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), pp. 371–372.

knowingly and explicitly direct their actions to the destruction of the world of heteronomy and the creation of a proper world of meaning, the world of autonomy? Castoriadis hints at a response when in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*⁴⁸ he invokes the existence of a collective of individuals who aim to overcome society's heteronomy 'because we will it and because we know that others will it as well, not because such are the laws of history, the interest of the proletariat or the destiny of being.'⁴⁹ Here Castoriadis highlights the role of singular subjects who form a collective through their *radical willing*.⁵⁰ But even if this characterises the orientation of radical democratic subjects, of itself willing is not sufficient to distinguish the genuine democrat from the pseudo-democrats whose mode of being perpetuates society's heteronomy.

For Castoriadis, radical democratic subjectivity is available to human subjects as a genuine alternative to heteronomous modes of social being, such as the consumerist conceptions of democratic subjectivity we noted above, because these modes of being differ at the ontological level. That is, the available choices are marked by a fundamental difference in orientation towards what Castoriadis calls 'the Chaos'. Here 'Chaos' invokes 'an unfathomable underside [*envers*] to everything [...] It is perpetual source, ever immanent alteration, [...] It is literally [...] creation/destruction, time as alterity/alteration.'⁵¹ For Castoriadis, the relationship between human beings and the Chaos is primordial. '[H]umanity continues, prolongs, recreates the Chaos, the Abyss, the Groundless from which it emerges' in each of the fundamental dimensions of human experience: 'as the Groundlessness of the *psyche*'s radical imagination'; as '*social Abyss*, the Groundlessness of the social imaginary' that creates signification and the institution; and as the Groundlessness of the *world*.⁵² The ways in which human beings respond to the Chaos on each of these levels is thus critical to the nature and meaning of their instituting activity. Indeed human beings must institute society in a way that *exposes the Chaos* of society and the world if they are to create their own world of meaning *explicitly* and hence autonomously.

48 Castoriadis, C. (1987).

49 Castoriadis, C. (1987), p. 373, (our emphasis).

50 For a discussion of this idea see Kalyvas, A. (2001). The politics of autonomy and the challenge of deliberation: Castoriadis contra Habermas. *Thesis Eleven*, 64: 1–19; Nicolacopoulos, T. and Vassilacopoulos, G. (2014). 'The time of radical autonomous thinking and social-historical becoming in Castoriadis's, *Thesis Eleven*', 120(1): 59–74.

51 Castoriadis, C. (1997), p. 322.

52 Castoriadis, C. (1997), p. 316, (our emphasis).

Castoriadis believes that the social imaginary significations of societies to date have mostly failed to meet this demand. They have been 'in their essence "religious": they have united recognition of the Abyss with its covering over.'⁵³ The covering up of the Chaos characterises the essentially 'religious' or 'quasi-religious' orientation of human beings who explicitly or implicitly deny society's self-instituting power in so far as they invoke some extra social source of signification, what Castoriadis calls 'the signification of signification.'⁵⁴ The religiously minded may be the ones who imagine the signification of signification in terms of the sacred, but the secularly oriented who invoke the laws of nature or history to explain the origin of signification are no less implicated in the practice of covering up of the Chaos. Castoriadis characterises the latter as 'quasi-religious' because in appealing to the laws of nature or history they too locate the origin of society elsewhere than in human beings.⁵⁵

Even so, despite this history and the fact that signification posits itself as total, as covering everything, the Chaos presents an ongoing challenge for human beings and their 'labour of signification', the work of creating a proper world of meaning through which everything is in principle capable of being interpreted. This is because instituted society can never 'totally cover over the Chaos.'⁵⁶ From Castoriadis's perspective, then, human beings always face the opportunity to confront the Chaos and the risk of not being able to succeed in doing so.⁵⁷ This is why it is in *the announcement of the Chaos*, both as social and as the Chaos of the world, that radical self-alteration is at once capable of bringing itself into being and of perpetuating the misrepresentation of its origin.

For Castoriadis, then, the mode of being of radical democratic subjectivity can and must be distinguished by the appropriate response to the Chaos of society and the world. We can thus understand the fundamental difference between autonomous radical democratic subjectivity and heteronomous consumerist conceptions of democratic subjectivity in terms of their responses to the Chaos. Whereas consumerist conceptions misrepresent or refuse to recognise the Chaos for what it is, autonomous democratic subjects 'accept the Chaos as Chaos.'⁵⁸ To accept the Chaos of society is to accept citizens as the

53 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 324.

54 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 314.

55 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 318.

56 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), pp. 311–313.

57 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 316.

58 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 324.

creators and perpetual questioners of the laws and institutions they create. To accept the Chaos of the world is to expose social being—society and human beings—as the ultimate source of signification and creation. Facing up to this challenge enables the participants in an autonomous collective of radical democratic subjects to recognise themselves as self-conscious creators of new *eidoi* and as ongoing questioners of the *nomos* they bring into being.

So far we have argued that Castoriadis is in a position to defend his conception of democratic subjectivity against the sort of concerns that contemporary thinkers such as Badiou and Brown raise only in so far as he can effectively distinguish radical democratic subjectivity from consumerist conceptions. For this he must rely on an account, not only of the radical willing of singular subjects, but also of the autonomous collective's distinctive response to the Chaos. An account of the ontology of radical democratic subjectivity as a matter of exposing the Chaos of the world is therefore crucial for Castoriadis's theory. But is this deference to the Chaos adequate? In the next section, we will begin to develop our claim that Castoriadis's account fails to convince. As we suggested at the outset, our argument is that exposing the Chaos cannot serve to distinguish the autonomous radical democrat if this relationship to the Chaos is also a feature of a more widely shared practice, namely that of owning. So in order to explain how the modern practice of owning constitutes activity that *exposes the Chaos of the world* we will turn next to outline our Hegelian reading of the development of subjectivity in modernity and, specifically, to the modern Western practice of property owning, which Hegel characterises as the mode of being of abstract subjectivity.

Exposing the Chaos and the Generalised Practice of Property-Owning

To start from the self, to live in the self, [...] abstract subjectivity, when it is still empty, or rather has made itself to be empty; such is pure formalism, the abstract principle of the modern world.⁵⁹

Castoriadis rejects the Hegelian idea of an abstract subjectivity on the ground that such ideas are the product of thinking that is not appropriately situated within the field of the social-historical. The individual is after all socially fabricated, the product of an irreducible tension that exists between

59 Hegel, G.W.F. (1956), Sibree, J. (Trans.). *Philosophy of History*, pp. 316–317. New York: Dover Publications.

the social historical anonymous collective and the singular dimension of the human being rooted in the psyche.⁶⁰ The individual's experience of autonomous activity does not require any emptying of the self since from Castoriadis's perspective to think and act autonomously is to remain fully embedded in concrete specificities; it is to experience genuine alterity or otherness and 'otherness is always the otherness of *something* in respect to another *something*.'⁶¹

However, Castoriadis' denial of the relevance of the Hegelian idea of abstract subjectivity to our times is too hasty. To see why, let us observe, firstly, that in liberal capitalist societies modern Western subjectivity has been disassociated from any immediate (unreflective) connections to substantive universal values. That is, in our public lives we are systematically discouraged from invoking richly filled values that we treat as universal without having to justify their status as such. Whereas in pre-modern social contexts and discourses Western subjects conflate particular ethical values with the universal, a universal that in turn functions as a kind of (natural) given, modern subjects are called upon, not only to adopt values through critical reflection, but also to question their universal application, as Castoriadis points out. The purported universality of claims that we might otherwise have taken for granted is itself exposed to the possibility of rigorous critical scrutiny. This much is consistent with the Castoriadis' interpretation of the emergence of a new mode of human being in Western modernity, namely the reflective and deliberating subjectivity we referred to above.

Secondly, Castoriadis would agree as well that outside our designated private spaces, we are called upon always to speak from our positions as *particular* individuals or collectives, as particular embodiments of this or that way of being and doing. So, for example, in liberal capitalist societies our world-view, like our way of life and our vision of the good, comes to be understood as the personal, spiritual and ethical convictions of an individual or of a member of a social group in his or her capacity as a particular unit of agency. Liberal discourse registers precisely this kind of affirmation of our particular being with its insistence on locating substantive ethical and spiritual values in the domain of the private or non-public sphere. This is the legacy of recognising the so-called 'fact of reasonable pluralism', the acknowledgement that, even

60 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 143.

61 Castoriadis, C. (1997a), p. 394, (emphasis added).

after full argument and debate, reasonable people will still disagree about the nature of the good and how we might come to an appreciation of it.⁶²

Thirdly, we would also agree with Castoriadis that modern subjects are no longer assumed to be the bearers of universal values that are received from the outside, so to speak, whether from our god(s) or our community, but have instead become self-identified sources of value. Even when we decide that certain values are objective and universal, it is still up to us as particular individuals freely to make these kinds of judgements. So, the bearers of multiple, conflicting and even incommensurable values inhabit modern Western societies as an outcome, not just of the co-presence and interaction of different world views and civilisations, but also of the very character of modern Western subjectivity. In engaging in the critical reflective activity that Castoriadis endorses this character does not remain unaffected.

But Castoriadis does not realise the full implications of the observation that in functioning as particular beings in the negative sense of not immediately (unreflectively) identifying with universal values, modern Western subjects' experience of this negative relation has decisively impacted upon the mode of exercising their reflective powers. First, precisely because we can differentiate between our particular and our universal being in the abovementioned way, we are in a position reflectively *to abstract* from all specificities, that is, to reject particular aspects of our being and to identify with others. Castoriadis insists that we create, rather than identify with, aspects of our particular being / becoming. As he points out, in its most basic form the modern subject is self-determining. But this also means that the being of the subject that gives itself its particular determinations is not reducible to (the sum of) these particulars. This in turn renders the self-determining power of modern Western subjectivity as wholly abstract. This 'emptying' brings the self back to its pure singularity, a singularity which grounds itself in its immediate self-centred awareness, which is expressed in the personal pronoun 'I'. Of course, for Castoriadis, this Hegelian account of the process of arriving at the pure immediacy of the 'I' as a result of abstracting from all specificities reflects the inherited tradition's problematic tendency towards nostalgia for an impossible, unmediated simple origin. But the self's immediate awareness, or pure self-concern, supplies *the form* of our being in Western modernity in the sense that it constitutes us as *formally* free. This is the framework of possibilities within which we actively position ourselves in relation to specificities, such race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and so on. Thus the subject's formal freedom is 'empty' in the

62 Rawls, J. (1993), *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

sense of being conceived as lacking any pre-given substantial determinations whatsoever.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, quite apart from our subjective awareness, in liberal capitalist societies this abstract mode of being is institutionally inscribed. We invoke it whenever we function as citizens, as legal subjects or as participants in the now global market economy. This institutional reinforcement of our reflective power of abstraction has an important social-historical consequence for modern Western subjectivity. It positions us to recognise both the independence of our abstract mode of being from its substantive contents and the fact that this independence in turn renders our being as formal. Following this recognition the continuity of our being depends upon a certain *form* whose multiple (potential) contents become endlessly variable. Currently in modernity our essential nature is thus the very formality that is made possible through a subjectively recognisable and institutionally reinforced exercise of the abovementioned power of abstraction. As formally free subjects who do not immediately identify with the universal, we conform to what we have elsewhere called 'the formal universality of particularity'. This principle supplies the form that constrains social being in today's world.⁶³

The abovementioned recognition of particularity represents a shift of attention from what something is as a specific entity to how it is located in a network of particulars. It is significant for our purposes that we can understand this shift from the 'what' to the 'how' of modern Western subjectivity via the Hegelian account of property-owning practice.⁶⁴ The power of property-owning plays a crucial role at the ontological level of our encounters in the global world of liberal capitalism because the idea of property-owning subjectivity defines the fundamental relationship between the subject in her capacity as a formal being and her world understood as the externality of this being. For property-owning subjectivity, everything beyond the subject's own abstract being has the potential to be transformed into a property item. Modern Western subjects thus have the capacity to (mis)treat their nation, ethnicity, children, body, skills, talents, and so on, as private property. Here, our focus is on property-owning as a power or capacity of human beings, as distinct from moral and legal discourses of property ownership that presuppose this fundamental power.

63 See Nicolacopoulos, T. and Vassilacopoulos, G. (2010). *Hegel and the Logical Structure of Love: An Essay on Sexualities, Families and the Law*, Part I. Melbourne: re.press.

64 Hegel, G.W.F. (1981). Knox, T.M. (Trans). *Philosophy of Right*. §34–§104. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

One implication of the emptiness of formal subjectivity is that it makes the being of all particulars a matter of their accessibility to the property-owning subject. The modern Western subject's abstract self-relation manifests the subject's very power to re-conceive and organise the world in a way that enables the subject to affirm itself in it. In other words, the world is already implicated in the subject's power of abstraction as the world of the subject, as the world that exists to serve the subject. The subject's activity of abstracting is, therefore, the point of potentiality out of which to create reality in conformity with the subject's self-centred awareness. In this way, the subject's power of self-determination is formulated in terms of something to be achieved rather than as a given. Unlike the epistemological awareness of the Cartesian subject that progressively leaves behind every specific aspect of the world in a (futile) effort to achieve self-certainty, the Hegelian subject's awareness is not trapped in its own internal space. It is constituted from the outset as what we might call 'the will-to-be'. Hence, for Hegel, the first imperative of the subject is: 'be as a person.'⁶⁵ At the same time, by implicating the world in its abstracting activity, the modern Western subject makes manifest the fundamental terms of its potential being in the world. From its position of a will-to-be, understood in the above terms, the external world—everything beyond the self-centred awareness of subjectivity—is constituted as its immediate other in the dual sense of an irreducibly different and separable other. From the standpoint of the will-to-be, this immediate other is constituted as that which exists without a will of its own. This is what Hegel refers to as 'the thing'. The Hegelian thing is a specificity, any particular whatsoever, that the subject positions as infinitely indifferent to itself and, hence, as capable of limitlessly receiving a will from the outside, so to speak. It is a thing that is in itself empty of will and, hence, something penetrable. So, under appropriate conditions the subject positioned as the will-to-be can choose to inhabit the thing. Within this conceptual framework, the thing is just as much an abstraction as the category of the formally free subject. Their difference lies in the idea that the latter actively draws upon the former: the will that is empty of concrete being depends upon the being of an existent that is empty of will.

This construction of the world is currently indispensable to the ways in which modern Western subjects function in the world, irrespective of whether we disapprove of this logic at an intellectual level. For example, as the will-to-be in the world, formally free subjects inevitably de-spiritualise the world of particulars. This enables us to embody our own will in the thing and thereby to transform it into our own property. Wilful possession of what was previously

65 Hegel, G.W.F. (1981). §36.

a will-less thing constitutes our primary form of embodiment; it is invoked whenever we assert: 'this is mine'. That is, in becoming what I am through my own act of will, and without the direct involvement of another will, I achieve for myself a kind of grounding that enables me to relate securely to myself as a concrete being and to my particular place in the world. It is this kind of self-grounding that underpins modern Western ideals of cosmopolitan lifestyles and consumerist orientations in the absence of a commitment to the universal orienting power of substantive values.

The subject-world relation we have been describing also harbours a contradiction, given that every act of possession does in fact implicate another will. Indeed, embodiment of a will in a thing presupposes a certain form of recognition. In transforming the thing into my property I extend myself into it and make it my concrete being, but within the framework generated by the logic of the above mentioned formal universality of particularity, property must be alienable. That is, it must be capable of being transferred to another property-owning subject. The maintenance of this sort of distance between the subject and its property items perpetuates the formalism inherent in our way of being. Without the alienability of property, which protects the property-owner from becoming locked to the concrete particularity of the property item, our formal freedom would be compromised. So, the mutual recognition of property-owners is an indispensable feature of our social interactions. Indeed, modern Western subjects encounter others as subjects by recognising them as private property-owning identities. Because exchange relations manifest this fundamental form of mutual recognition, their ongoing re-enactment plays the role of affirming our way of being in Western modernity, just as custom and religion might do in different socio-historical contexts. In our secularised world that has broken its ties with tradition, the recognition of formal subject-to-subject relations relies on the idea of the will-less thing instead. This is why we become complicit in consumer society and continue to be drawn into the global network of commodity circulation, even when we are convinced by critiques of Western modernity, of its notions of formal freedom and of our related abuse of nature and injustices to non-Western peoples.

On the Hegelian account we have just sketched, within the world of liberal capitalism the enactment of abstract, property-owning subjectivity presupposes the *absolute indifference* of the world. Here, 'the world' refers to nature understood as the radical other of subjects as singular units of self-concern. Indeed the practice of owning something specific exposes the mode of being or universality of this absolute indifference. We suggested above that the practice of owning redirects us from the 'what' to the 'how' of property-owning ontology. It also involves a parallel shift from the 'what' of the thing owned,

to its mode of being. Irrespective of their substantive differences, that things, for example, this land or these trees, are owned presupposes that they are radically equal in relation to the capacity to be owned. In other words, that they are owned presupposes that they equally belong to the set of things that are potential property items, and which, prior to actually being owned, can nonetheless be identified as such by the subject capable of acting as a property owner. The subject must be capable of making the realm of ownability or, the mode of being of absolute indifference, accessible. This realm of the ownable is the horizon in which the subject positions himself or herself to enact his or her self-concern, the will-to-be, through the practice of owning things. Prior to actually owning this or that specific thing, the owning subject gathers together all things, present and future, as well as any combination of these, as ownable and thus becomes the bearer of such horizon.

In this way the subject posits himself or herself as the bearer of the world's indifference, the universal mode of being of the world, in which things in general are positioned so as to reveal their capacity to embody the subject's willing being. We have suggested that the infinite penetrability of the thing enables the infinite realisability of the will-to-be. The will-to-be is intentional towards specific things at the same time as directing itself away from things and towards itself as the agent who, in exercising self-concern, wills his or her willing. This will-to-will is the infinite element in self-concern and the ultimate source of the formal subject's significant agency. It is at this level of *willing* the will-to-be that the subject affirms his or her atomic being as being in need of externalisation. So by implicating the world's mode of being, its absolute indifference, in this process, the subject posits himself or herself as exclusively self-concerned. Owning, then, or the enactment of the will-to-be, is the act through which the thing owned is 'abstracted' from its whatness in order for its mode being to be affirmed as absolutely indifferent. Owning 'elevates' the specific thing owned to the universal horizon of indifference and at the same time draws this horizon down to the thing, so to speak, which embodies this indifference. It follows that owning has a cosmic dimension and the practice of owning has the potential to reveal the cosmic aloneness of self-concerned beings, the fact that we are alone in a world that is indifferent both to us and to its own being.⁶⁶

66 We could mention here in passing that the radicalisation of revealing the indifference of the world that we refer to as nature through the general and radical practice of owning that is liberated from constraints of tradition, religion, etc., is the fundamental presupposition for the mathematical knowing of nature. Scientific knowing is grounded on owning as the power to expose indifference as the mode of being of nature. Ultimately,

Castoriadis recognises and invokes the indifference of the world when he tries to explain why the world depends upon the Chaos. He observes that of itself the world is 'senseless, devoid of signification.'⁶⁷ But if humanity is truly alone in the cosmos so that its significations derive exclusively from its own self-relating in the way that Castoriadis maintains, of itself the world must be *absolutely* indifferent, that is, indifferent to signification *as such* and not just to this or that conglomeration of social imaginary significations. Castoriadis confirms this when attempting to explain the very possibility of the heterogeneity of social imaginary significations throughout history:

In relation to imaginary time, as well as to the whole edifice of imaginary significations erected by each society, we ask: How must the world be, in itself, in order that this amazing and unlimited variety of imaginary edifices can be erected? The only possible answer is: The world must be tolerant and indifferent as between all these creations. It must make room for them, and for all of them, and not prevent, favour, or impose any among them over and against the others. In short: the world must be void of meaning. It is only because there is no signification intrinsic to the world that humans had, and were able, to endow it with this extraordinary variety of strongly heterogeneous meanings.⁶⁸

Here Castoriadis explains the great variety of social imaginary significations *across* different societies and times. But we should extend the point to the variety of social imaginary significations *within* such societies as well, that is, within pluralistic societies consisting of variously derived particular significations. Such a (re)presentation of social being as constituted by particulars amongst a plurality of particulars conforms to what we referred to above as the formal universality of particularity. If this is correct, then the practice of owning through which, as we suggested above, singular subjects conform their being to the formal universality of particularity, is entailed in the diversity of significations whose existence Castoriadis observes.

This said, in the above cited passage Castoriadis appears to be simply inferring the world's indifference as a matter of empirical observation regarding the historical plurality of meanings. But if they are to be effectively distinguished, that is, distinguished *in their practice*, Castoriadis's autonomous

and contra Heraclitus, nature cannot hide itself from us precisely because we can 'unlock' its ultimate secret, indifference, as its mode of being.

67 Castoriadis, C. (1997), p. 363.

68 Castoriadis, C. (1997), p. 389.

radical democratic subjects—those who he suggests expose the Chaos of the world with their activity—must be shown to be (capable of) acting in a way that exposes the world's absolute indifference. This means that they must be shown to confront the world's absolute indifference directly in their experience of the world since it is this experience, rather than an intellectual relationship, that is at stake in the differentiation of the orientation of the autonomous collective of radical democratic subjects from the consumerist conceptions that Castoriadis opposes. But when we turn from the 'what' to the 'how' of the property-owning practice we find that the enactment of property-owning relations already exposes the world's absolute indifference, albeit through the singular subject's relationship to the thing and to exchange. In liberal capitalist societies radical and consumerist democrats alike are already implicated in the practice of owning in their shared capacity as modern Western subjects. This is why exposing the Chaos of the world cannot possibly *distinguish* the radical democratic subject.

Radical Democratic Subjectivity and the Empty Subject of the Modern World

We suggested above that in liberal capitalism the practice of owning that exposes the absolute indifference of the world also manifests the *universal form* of willing subjectivity in so far it involves a singular subject who wills its will-to-be. If we are right about this, then we should expect Castoriadis's account of willing subjectivity to remain within the restricted parameters of this universal form, despite Castoriadis's own failure to make this connection with the radical willing of democratic subjects that he invokes. To put the same point differently, we should be able to indicate how modern Western property-owning subjects are in a position, either to affirm the institutions and accumulation practices of the global liberal capitalist order or to turn against these precisely because and in so far as they ground their being as subjects in the empty formalism that characterises their willing activity. The subject's willing activity is so emptily plastic that it can endlessly give itself opposing forms, thus creating a vicious spiral, which sinks into the depths of its formalism so much so that it has no hope of escape, even when, like Castoriadis, one seeks to overcome that which one considers politically unacceptable. According to Hegel,

[...] this unrestricted possibility of abstraction from every determinate state of mind which I may find in myself or which I may have set up in myself [...] When the will's self-determination consists in this alone or

when representative thinking regards this side [of the will] by itself as freedom and clings fast to it then we have negative freedom [...] This is the freedom of the void which rises to a passion and takes shape in the world; [...] when it turns to actual practice, it takes shape in religion and politics alike as the fanaticism of destruction—[...] Only in destroying something does this negative will possess the feeling of itself as existent. Of course it imagines that it is willing some positive state of affairs, such as universal equality or universal religious life.⁶⁹

Here Hegel draws attention to the way in which the ‘freedom of the void’ takes shape specifically in religious and political activity. But bearing in mind our discussion of Castoriadis so far, we can also draw upon these comments to assist us in identifying a certain correspondence between the currently available concrete shapes of willing subjectivity—the concrete forms of willing available to abstract subjects in Hegel’s sense—and the Castoriadian categories of the instituting, the instituted and the institutable. In line with these categories we suggest that in so far as subjects enact their abstract, property-owning being within liberal capitalist society, three concrete forms of willing relationship to the (Chaos of the) world become available to them. Although Hegel does not refer to it in the above cited passage, the first of these three forms involves an affirmation of the existing order. In this case the subject is constituted through his or her willing implication in the very ‘circulation of desires’ and ‘short-run gratifications’ that Badiou and Brown respectively assign to the democratic subject. In affirming the instituted world of capitalism through such willing, the (heteronomous) mode of willing that characterises consumerist conceptions of democratic subjectivity effectively *privileges the instituted*. Such privileging is entailed by the fact that liberal capitalism presupposes what we can call ‘the privatisation of significance’. It is because the willing subject attributes significance to its atomic subjective being that the most fundamental public significations embodied in liberal institutions are understood as value-free or neutral. The privatisation of significance liberates the public realm of instituted significations in a way that makes it possible for them to delineate the social spaces for the co-existence of a plurality of value orientations that private citizens make significant.

What of the forms of willing that are given effect with the destructive religious and political activity that Hegel describes above? Both these forms involve the aspiration to break out of the current mode of instituted society. As we noted above, these possibilities arise because, being the power to privatise

69 Hegel, G.W.F. (1981). §5. (Remark).

significance, the willing subject is in a position to reject the current mode of instituted society, to see it as insignificant and seek alternative sources of significance. Let us consider these in turn.

First, in deferring to an extra-social instituting authority in God, the mode of willing that characterises religion thus *privileges human beings as institutable*. In other words, this view gives primacy to the potential of the anonymous collective to receive its God-given shape, the community of believers. As we have already seen, Castoriadis advocates a form of willing that presents as an alternative to both the consumerist and religious forms of willing and in the latter case it is the problematic misrepresentation of the source of signification to which he objects. Even so, his formulation of the relationship of the categories of the instituted, the instituting and the institutable is sufficiently broad to accommodate religious willing activity such as that which Oliver Davis describes in the following passage:

[...] our self-knowing is simultaneously a recognition or condition of our unity. We do not mean by this some sense of self, which is transcendently located outside history and the multiple narratives, which constitute our social and historical identity. [...] But we do wish to argue for a self who comes to itself precisely within such narratives, and within its relation with multiple forms of otherness. This is to affirm the self in its unity, as that which enables us to identify all the narratives of experience as existence that is “mine”. Such a sense of unity is the ground of the narrative structure of experience as such, and also entails the recognition that something remains over from the dispersal of the self through the multiplication of its narratives, which is the “metanarrativity” or “essential narrativity” of the self. The historical thematization of this transcendence is as inwardness and interiority, which [...] signifies the sphere of pure self-possession transcendently given within experience and resistant to reduction to history. This is the site of our self-knowing as creature, and is the simultaneous recognition of our dependence on God in sinfulness, finitude and pride.⁷⁰

For Davis religious subjectivity is thus conceived as rooted in the social-historical and defined by the ‘multiple forms of otherness’ that constitute its relations. Here, however, there is some scope for acknowledging society’s self-instituting power and, hence, for taking up the task of destroying capitalism’s institutions of domination, once the exteriority of the subject’s being has been

70 Davis, O. (2003). *A Theology of Compassion*, pp. 8–9. Michigan, Cambridge: Ferdmans.

differentiated from its interiority so that God comes to inform the latter. In relation to the former, however, one can reasonably suggest that the experience of 'finitude', which amounts to a recognition of the insignificance of the singular as the private source of significance, is grounded in the ability of the singular to expose the absolute indifference of the world via enactment of the generalised practice of owning, as we discussed above. But in this case, the singular can be said to seek significance—meaningfulness, as distinct from signification(s)—through the sacred. Hence the adoption of a form of willing that privileges the institutable. So, in rejecting today's politically apathetic consumer driven society one may well, as Castoriadis insists, be merely masking the Chaos by deferring to an extra-social authority via the sacred. But from our perspective, it is noteworthy that, like the consumerist's form of willing, the form of willing of the modern religious subject also conforms to the constraints of the 'empty' subject. Rather than defining religious subjectivity in terms of the practice of masking the Chaos in seeking God, Davis' nuanced account supports the view that the religious subject's form of willing may in fact expose the Chaos as the precondition for both the practice of privatising significance and the rejection of this privatisation.

The final form of willing we want to consider is that which underpins Castoriadis's radical democratic subject. Our claim is that radical democratic subjectivity is similarly implicated in the inwardness of the void that Hegel describes and thus illustrates a third form of willing that liberal capitalist society makes available. In seeking the radical creation and destruction of *nomos*, this third form of willing *privileges the instituting* power of the subject. Like religious subjectivity that privileges the institutable, radical democratic subjectivity aspires to create community, albeit in the shape of the democratic collective. But this aspiration is not linked to an external authority, like God but derives instead from the radical democratic subject's own willing, which, like the religious subject, rejects the privatisation of significance. At the same time, unlike the religious subject who seeks significance from the divine, Castoriadis's subject treats its own willing activity as the source of universal significance. In treating its self-concern and, therefore, the power of abstraction as the power to institute society, the radical subject posits *the willing subject as such* as the ultimate creator of significations. The willing subject is thus elevated to the bearer of the command to ceaselessly institute the collective and its institutions.

Paradoxically, it is in this gesture of rejecting God as the source of (heteronomous) significance, that the radical democratic subject encounters the believer as another version of the same act, that of abstracting from the communal. More specifically, we can detect the source of an unacknowledged

abstraction in the radical democratic subject's activity of seeking the collective. This is an abstraction from the communal understood as the source of the significance of unconditional togetherness, the source of meaningfulness, that is capable of transforming the insignificant singular who is willing to accept the Chaos into a being with significance.⁷¹ Notice that in both cases the call to institute society is not the call *of* community in the sense of the indeterminate, uninstitutable community which when reflected upon and experienced as the ultimate source of the significance of belonging cannot be reduced to the mere result of a process. Instead for the radical democratic subject, as for Davis's religious subject, the call to institute is a call *to create* community, although the source of this call is respectively the radical willing subject himself or herself and the loving God. Here the subject who seeks the communal is not the subject who derives significance from the being of the collective itself, a being whose substance is not dependent upon the singular subject's radical willing. Rather, the willing subject is the atomic subject who, being empty of community, seeks it at the same time as devaluing or exaggerating its significance. Castoriadis's reliance on a view of atomic subjectivity, in the abovementioned sense of avoiding any non-reductive appeal to community, is evidenced in his treatment of the autonomous collective, which, as we have already observed, draws exclusively upon radical willing subjects' *shared* knowing and doing. (Recall, for example, that the supersession of heteronomous society is possible in so far as *each one of us wills* it and *knows that* others will it as well, so that the autonomous collective is at best a group of like-minded individuals.) By seeking the collective, the radical democratic subject does indeed oppose the privatisation of significance, but in doing so he merely finds his own 'void', since aiming to create the autonomous collective presupposes a detachment from the community. The collective is reduced to *an aim to be achieved* by otherwise dispersed individuals who know nothing of the substantive power of the call of community and of the experience of 'receiving' this call as their unconditional starting point for the pursuit of the aim of exercising their instituting power. It follows that with Castoriadis's abstraction from the call of community, the

71 In 'The time of radical autonomous thinking and social-historical becoming in Castoriadis's (2014) we argue that Castoriadis opens himself to the objection that he fails to assign a real place in his theory to social being as significant. Castoriadis advocates the autonomy of significance by way of contrast to the heteronomy of significance that he attributes to the prevailing (quasi-)religious attitude without, however, considering the possibility of what we call 'the heteronomy of *insignificance*'. The heteronomy of insignificance is manifested in modern property relations whose enactment, as we argue above, exposes the Chaos of the world, its fundamental indifference to meaning.

modern Western subject's formalism is here exposed in its apotheosis as the instituting power of the *nomos*.

We have been arguing that in the light of its presupposed abstraction from the call of the unconstitutable community, formal subjectivity faces three potential paths corresponding to the three forms of concrete willing we identified above. The otherwise insignificant subject may choose to accept his or her insignificance (the consumerist democrat); he or she may seek significance through the sacred (the religious subject); or the subject may seek significance in his or her own power of willing (Castoriadis's radical democratic subject). Regardless of which of these paths the willing subject takes, such a response to the world of liberal capitalism conforms to the mode of being of empty subjects in Hegel's sense. With this in mind, we are now in a position to appreciate one of the implications of the emptiness or the void that is the core of property-owning subjectivity, the generalised mode of being of 'empty' subjects within Western liberal societies. In so far as the reflective subject is empty of the communal, the substantive power of the unconstitutable significance of the collective does not inform the dimensions of the instituting, the constitutable and the constituted that we mentioned at the outset. They therefore appear as three disconnected dimensions of the Castoriadian (empty) subject's experience. Being oblivious to the primordial significance of the communal, the reflective subject views each of these three dimensions of experience as dispersed and externally related to one another and this in turn favours the privileging of one of them at the expense of the others. In the final section we will illustrate the claim that Castoriadis privileges the instituting power of the subject in the way suggested. Exemplifying Hegel's 'freedom of the void', the radical democratic subject's instituting practice is made to depend upon an unceasing questioning that ultimately fails to question its own proper place.

Questioning and the Practice of Instituting

As we noted at the outset, according to Castoriadis's elucidation of the workings of a fully autonomous society, to affirm society's self-instituting power is not just to affirm the power to create new *nomos*, it is also to affirm *the power perpetually to question* what is created. For Castoriadis it is instructive that ancient Greece and modern Europe, the only two epochs that he takes to have given rise to autonomy, are also the only times 'where questioning of the existing institutions has occurred.'⁷² These two periods suggest to Castoriadis

72 Castoriadis, C. (1996), p. 49.

the potential for a constant struggle between the autonomous self-reflective subjects who are the creators of their society's institutions and the institutions thus created, which serve to foster the forgetting of their social-historical making and in this struggle it is the practice of questioning that recalls the significance of 'social doing'. Let us explain.

For Castoriadis, the institution always has the tendency *to forget its origin* and to posit itself as an end in itself.⁷³ Radical questioning of society's norms is crucial for society's self-instituting because it is through such questioning that the radical instituting power safeguards against the ossification that the instituted is always in danger of producing, no matter how it is created. We might say that the institution tends to posit us as its *mere* receivers. But the integrity of the instituting activity of the autonomous collective requires that it not be absorbed in the instituted. Put differently, if it is to counteract the tendency of the institution to forget its origin, the power of instituting must always overflow the instituted. For this reason, even though Castoriadis is not committed to a model of democracy as pure proceduralism, nevertheless what matters from the standpoint of his theory is the process of instituting *disassociated from* the product of such a process, namely that which is specifically instituted. At the same time, Castoriadis does not credit the institution of itself with any (potential) significance. The significance of the institution derives from 'social doing', 'the doing of men and women in society, and nothing else' that characterises 'politics, in the profound sense' of society's self-transforming activity, 'society's thinking as making itself.'⁷⁴ For both these reasons then—the disassociation of process from product and the assignment of only derivative significance to the product of creativity—Castoriadis's understanding of the workings of a fully autonomous society privileges the power and practice of instituting over the instituted.

But in Castoriadis's scheme, *the practice* of instituting effectively becomes reduced to the power of questioning. The distinguishing quality of the Castoriadian radical democratic subject becomes, not so much the will to create new *eidos* as Castoriadis maintains, but rather *the will to question* whatever has been created. After all, heteronomous societies also create their institutions and significations, albeit unknowingly. Recall that in highlighting the practice of questioning Castoriadis elucidates a process of re-capturing society's instituting power in order to avoid thinking of the instituted as fixed and instituted once and for all. However, this 'anxiety' about preserving intact the power of instituting stems from an (implicit) abstraction from the communal,

73 Castoriadis, C. (1987), p. 110.

74 Castoriadis, C. (1987), p. 373.

an abstraction that, as we noted above, grounds the privileging of the subject's formalism and reduces the communal to an aim to be achieved. Since (perhaps due to his own political experience) Castoriadis does not conceive of the communal as unconditionally received and, hence, as the indeterminate and un-institutable source of significance, he does not take seriously the possibility of incorporating into his theory the idea of the perpetual (re)creation of the same institutions as the defining act of a genuinely autonomous society. In other words, what is lost sight of is two ideas: firstly, that the creativity of radical democratic subjects presupposes that they acquire their power of willing and their self-concern precisely because they are at once receivers of the call of community from the outset; and, secondly, that the institutions they create are overflowed, not by the awareness of the instituting power of willing subjects, but by the indeterminate significance of the un-institutable communal. This overflowing, which cannot be reduced to subjective willing, is the only power capable of perpetually resituating the members of the collective in their original position of receiving the call to (re)institute themselves precisely because they are already situated in the significant field of togetherness. It is such overflowing that leads the institutions and the significations they embody back to the source of significance in a perpetual act of re-creating the same by recurrently experiencing it as new. In the absence of this sort of movement, namely the 'pulsating' mutual informing of communal significance and the instituted significations that bring together the 'new' and the 'same', the incessant practice of instituting can only be grounded on the activity of questioning. When the subject is not (re)posited as the creator of institutions he or she is not drawn back to the significant field of the communal and is thus not positioned to 'forget' the status of the already created thereby enabling the (re)activation of the process of creation as such. Here the subject has no other recourse but to remind himself or herself that he / she is the creator.

But in this case, the already established institutions are the only reference point. Having been created, they must be actively 'remembered' *as-created* through incessant questioning. The practice of incessant questioning thus captures and re-activates the process of creating and it does so by prioritising the power of questioning over the activity of creating / instituting as well as over that created. Creativity and creation are thus subordinated to the power of questioning.

When questioning is given primacy in this way, even though the possibilities for creation are multiple and remain open in accordance with the formal universality of particularity we discussed above, this openness remains true only of their content, not of their mode of being. On one level, as we have already suggested, whatever is created must inevitably conform to the

formal universality of particularity. If the institution is created by the power of instituting and destroyed through the practice of questioning, every time an institution is created it must be taken to be a *particular* institution. But the privileging of the instituting over the instituted ultimately restricts the mode of being of the instituted in that it reduces it to the *destructible*. For as the guarantee against the ossifying tendency of institutions, the mode of being of whatever is created must conform to the potentially destructible. Since the fact of having been created is revealed in an institution's being destroyed, in principle, society's creativity becomes explicit with every act of destroying whatever has been created. Castoriadis thus relies on a kind of unacknowledged closure with respect to the mode of being of the instituted. This is why, even though the practice of perpetual questioning provides the benefit of safeguarding the singularity of subjects—their singularity is not thereby absorbed by the institution—nevertheless, the privileging of perpetual questioning in the way just described ultimately manifests the negativity that Hegel ascribes to the politically active 'empty' subject.

If our argument is sound, Castoriadis's radical democratic subject is the apotheosis of the 'empty' self that Hegel identifies with the dominant mode of being in the modern world, namely the abstract being of property-owning subjectivity. In conforming thus to the possibilities available to property-owning subjectivity, the power of instituting does not seem capable of taking us beyond the structures of capitalist domination, despite Castoriadis's aspirations to the contrary. Castoriadis does not escape an inadvertent reduction of radical democratic subjectivity to the empty formalism that he otherwise opposes. His account of radical democratic subjectivity relies on a one sided appreciation of the role that the Chaos or indifference of the world plays in the primordial subject-world relation. Although he is right to suggest that exposing ourselves to such cosmic indifference is the precondition for liberating ourselves from authoritative givens, this negative interpretation of the role of the Chaos, leads to a politics of the perpetual questioning of the institutions we create in an effort to avert their heteronomous ossification. But we also need to overcome our exclusive dependence on the indifferent if we are to re-connect with that which is unconditionally concerned with us, namely the significance of togetherness. To receive such a significant community is to move beyond atomic subjectivity and the abstract mode of being of property-owning more generally; it is to experience the expanding self of the member of the genuine collective.

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